Taxi! A narrative study of low-skilled work from a career boundary perspective.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Helen Cooper

ABSTRACT

Whilst conceptualisations of career have broadened beyond traditional notions of climbing a professional ladder, empirical research continues to prioritise investigating the career experiences of a skilled elite. This has left low-skilled employment characterised primarily as problematic work and dismissed as careerless. However, research has identified occasional reports of meaningful, sustained careers being constructed by low-skilled workers. This thesis therefore seeks to understand better how individuals themselves interpret undertaking low-skilled work from a career perspective.

The study investigates the career narratives of cab drivers who work in what has been classified as a low-skilled, dirty and precarious occupation. More specifically, it examines how the career narrative that each cab driver constructs is shaped by career boundaries. Narrative interviews with 32 cab drivers explored any prior work roles, the transition into cab driving and subsequent work experiences. Thematic analysis identified a core set of occupation, intra-occupation and personal boundaries which cab drivers perceived as constraining or enabling their career in many different ways. Narrative plotline analysis then highlighted how these varied boundary experiences shaped an array of career narratives ranging from cab driving as work of last resort, to a rewarding, lifelong career.

This thesis offers new, important and timely insights into low-skilled career experiences. The results extend existing theory by identifying the central role of boundaries in shaping different types of low-skilled careers. They also illustrate how investigating career narratives from a boundary perspective provides nuanced insights into complex subjective career experiences. From a policy perspective, the findings inform contemporary debates by showing how career boundaries may facilitate positive career experiences, in spite of poor pay rates and insecure contracts in the low-skilled sector. Finally, by acknowledging both career challenges and opportunities associated with low-skilled work, this thesis enables career counsellors to assist clients in evaluating their career options more effectively.

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Whilst I cannot name the cab drivers who participated in the research, without them this study would not have been possible. Participants took time out from their busy work schedules to be interviewed and also went to great lengths to encourage other colleagues to join the study. They all offered personal insights into their working lives with unfailing patience. Their kindness extended to repairing my car when it broke down en route to one particular interview. Thanks to their collective generosity of spirit, the six months that I spent out in the field proved to be one of the most rewarding research experiences in both an intellectual and personal sense.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Low-skilled work has been long regarded by society as something substantively different to skilled employment; a problematic poor relation, bereft of opportunities to construct careers (Mooney et al., 2016). This idea has predominated even within the career field itself, in spite of many conceptualisations of career widening to acknowledge all work experiences (Gunz et al., 2020). As a result, low-skilled work has at best been conceived of as a stepping-stone into more desirable skilled employment (D'Arcy & Finch, 2017). This has resulted in a vicious circle as researchers have prioritised understanding the intricacies of skilled career experiences, thereby allowing outdated perceptions of low-skilled work as careerless and unworthy of study to prevail.

The thesis sets out to challenge this prevailing view, by investigating how a complex array of different subjective career experiences can arise even within a single low-skilled occupation. This opening chapter sets out the rationale for the thesis in more detail, highlights its key aims and identifies the research questions. Additionally, it explains how the origins of this research are rooted in my career counselling practitioner role, as well as why the decision was taken to locate the study in the context of the cab driving trade. Finally, a short overview of the thesis structure is provided.

1.2 Rationale for the Research

Whilst many conceptualisations of career in the twenty-first century have widened beyond traditional notions of climbing a professional career ladder (Gunz et al., 2020), empirical investigations have continued to focus primarily on the career experiences of a skilled elite (Barnes et al., 2016). In the meantime, employment in low-skilled occupations has continued to be characterised typically as problematic work, as a result of concerns about its routine nature (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016), low pay rates (Low Pay Commission, 2016), precarious contractual arrangements (Taylor et al., 2017) and low status (Cassell & Bishop, 2014). Furthermore, whilst research has identified the significance of unfolding work transitions in shaping professional and managerial career patterns (Dlouhy & Biemann, 2020), transitions beyond this elite remain largely undifferentiated. In particular, career mobility in the context of low-skilled work has often been dismissed as job-hopping (Lyons & Schweitzer, 2015). This idea has endured, despite many contemporary definitions of career broadening out to acknowledge all work experiences (Brown, 2016). Instead, theory and empirical investigations have continued to side-line low-skilled work experiences as careerless (Belt, 2004).

This situation has prevailed for many years, in spite of repeated calls to understand better whether meaningful careers can be constructed in a low-skilled work setting (Brown, 2016; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). These calls have arisen for a number of important reasons, not least that ‘those employed in non-managerial roles remain a silent majority, whose concerns and experiences deserve a higher priority’ (Guest & Sturges, 2007, p. 312). Furthermore, a small number of empirical studies have hinted at a more complex picture regarding notions of career in low-skilled work settings. For example, contemporary research into the gig economy has begun to uncover individual experiences ranging from disaffection with low pay and precarious work roles in low-skilled settings, to career satisfaction levels typically associated with more stable and high-status careers (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development [CIPD], 2017). A handful of qualitative studies over the years has also identified that those working in low-skilled occupations may construct their own career

hierarchies, status passages and elites (Mooney et al., 2016). However, the sporadic nature of such studies means that these career experiences remain poorly understood, even whilst the number of low-skilled jobs in many occupations continues to grow in the United Kingdom (Bakhshi et al., 2017).

In response, this thesis aims to provide a timely investigation into how transitions into and within a low-skilled occupation are perceived to arise and then unfold over time. The approach taken involves investigating career narratives from a career boundary perspective, in order to explore individual cab driving career experiences. Exploring the interplay between career narrative and boundary processes is important and interesting for three key reasons. First, a growing body of work has identified the construction of career narratives as a key means by which people make sense of their working lives (Savickas, 2012). Narratives have become valued for providing rich, temporal and contextualised accounts of complex career issues, such as career choice and career transition processes (Atkinson et al., 2015). Additionally, researchers have used a narrative perspective to investigate the temporal unfolding of occupational career experiences (Herman, 2015). Narrative research has also led to the conceptualisation of career identity as a phenomenon that evolves and is reconstructed over time (Bresnen et al., 2019). However, there have been calls for studies to explore career narratives in more diverse occupational settings (LaPointe, 2013). This study therefore extends the conceptualisation of career narratives beyond the skilled sector, to examine complex variations in subjective low-skilled career experiences.

Second, there has been a critical re-appraisal of the boundaryless career concept (Arthur, 2014; Rodrigues et al., 2016), sparking renewed interest in the role of boundaries in shaping careers. The particular focus in this study is upon boundaries as phenomena that demarcate and differentiate career domains (Gunz et al., 2007). These career boundaries have the potential to not only constrain but also to enable the construction of a career over time (Inkson et al., 2012). The management of career boundaries has been investigated as a key component of anything from the microprocesses of daily shifts between work and non-work (Kreiner et al., 2009), to boundary crossing processes associated with transitions between jobs, organisations and occupations (Ashforth, 2001).

It has also included the unfolding of organisational, occupational and international careers (Clarke, 2013; Rodrigues et al., 2016; Yao & Doherty, 2014). However, empirical work to date has focused largely on how boundaries shape high-skilled careers, resulting in calls for studies to investigate comparable boundary processes in other work environments (Guest & Rodrigues, 2014). This study responds by examining the nature and role of salient career boundary processes in the context of cab driving work.

A third important feature of this study is that it brings together two contemporary conceptualisations of career. The first concerns the notion that individuals make sense of their career experiences through narrative, such that 'career is a narrative' (Young & Popadiuk, 2012, p. 14). The second is Inkson's (2006, p. 55) reinterpretation of career as something which unfolds 'within, and across, many different kinds of boundary.' In drawing these two ideas together, this thesis argues that individuals in all employment settings, including low-skilled work, will construct a career narrative that is shaped by career boundaries. Unlike existing fragmented approaches, this conceptual framework offers a more comprehensive means of understanding complex and nuanced low-skilled career experiences. In this study, applying this framework provided new insights into which boundaries cab drivers regarded as salient, the different ways in which they were perceived and how these varied boundary experiences shaped the construction of different types of career narratives.

In order to achieve the aims outlined above, this research investigates cab driving career experiences associated with an occupation that has been classified as low-skilled, dirty and precarious work. The study adopts a constructivist position and employs qualitative methods in order to examine how the career narratives that individual cab drivers construct are shaped by the career boundaries that they encounter during the course of their work. The sample group comprised 32 cab drivers living in an English county district bordering onto London. They included minicab and taxi drivers working in rural and town locations, as well as black cab and Uber drivers working in central London. The localised differentiation and colloquial labelling of cab driver roles will be examined in more detail in this thesis, but the term 'cab driver' is employed throughout as a convenient means of referring collectively to all forms

of this work role. Face-to face narrative interviews were undertaken with each research participant and their career narratives were examined using thematic analysis and then narrative plotline analysis to address the following research questions:

How are cab drivers' career narratives shaped by career boundaries?

1. Which career boundaries do cab drivers identify as salient in their career narratives?
2. Why do cab drivers perceive these career boundaries as salient?
3. What type of career narrative do cab drivers construct about their career boundary experiences?

1.3 Origins of the Thesis

This thesis has its origins in my work as a career counselling practitioner. I trained in this role originally by undertaking the MSc Career Management & Counselling at Birkbeck. I then went on to undertake this doctoral thesis alongside my ongoing work as a career counsellor. My practitioner role involves working with adult clients from a wide variety of social groups, occupational specialisms and career stages. They seek help with issues ranging from dissatisfaction with their current job, to coping with redundancy. A regular feature of this work involves exploring options with them for changing occupation and developing their career in a new work setting. However, whilst I can call on a rich array of research to advise clients about career issues in skilled settings, there is far less available regarding the low-skilled sector.

The problem with existing career theory and empirical research is that much of it is rooted in skilled career experiences. Traditional 'trait and factor' career theory does offer a useful framework for advising clients about best occupational fit in the low-skilled sector (McMahon & Patton, 2006). However, in terms of undertaking mid-career and late career transitions, research has been undertaken primarily in the skilled sector (Blau, 2009; Carless & Arnupp, 2011; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015). There is also research concerned with building successful managerial careers (Baruch et al., 2014; Bown-Wilson & Parry, 2013; Chen et al., 2011), as well as overcoming challenges faced by

minority groups in breaking through into the upper echelons of skilled occupations (Anderson, 2005; Glass & Cook, 2016: Ossenkop et al., 2015). However, there is a relative dearth of research concerned specifically with constructing a sustained career in the low-skilled sector (Baruch et al., 2016). This is a substantive short-coming from a practitioner perspective, as it means that existing research fails to fully inform my work with those clients considering taking up low-skilled work and attempting to construct a career in this sector.

As a result of my practitioner experiences, I was interested in undertaking a study that would not only contribute to academic knowledge, but also be of value in a career counselling setting. Practitioners have been identified as well-placed to identify relevant research themes, as well as disseminate findings back to their career practice community (Neary & Hutchinson, 2009). As a practitioner, I have to manage a difficult tension in discussing potential transitions into low-skilled occupations with clients. On the one hand, I often need to help them in a pragmatic way with finding work quickly, which may include considering low-skilled employment (Plant & Kjaergard, 2016). However, in doing so I risk being complicit in promoting work that is poorly paid, characterised by precarious employment contracts and perceived typically as offering few opportunities for building a sustainable career (Hooley & Sultana, 2016). This tension is exacerbated by having only limited research to draw upon when advising clients about short or long-term transitions into low-skilled employment. As a result, I wanted to undertake an empirical study that would help to inform this important component of career counselling work and the thesis includes discussion about its implications for practice.

As a career counsellor I also brought a particular set of practitioner skills and experiences to this empirical study, which impacted upon the research process in several ways. As qualitative research methods have evolved, counselling skills such as active listening, reflexivity and role boundary management have been identified as useful in undertaking face-to-face, in-depth research interviews with participants (McLeod, 2011). In this sense, my practitioner skills would prove valuable in managing narrative interviews with research participants. However, counselling practitioners have reported experiencing role conflict during qualitative interviews, as a result of it mirroring their practice work

(Allmark et al., 2009). Such reports have led to calls for a better understanding of researcher-practitioner experiences and the development of best practice approaches to manage associated role conflict issues (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). This thesis therefore identifies both the benefits and challenges that my practitioner role brought to the research process. It also identifies the practical strategies that I employed in order to manage my role boundaries during the fieldwork stage of this study and considers their potential to contribute to ethical research practice.

1.4 The Cab Driving Industry

Whilst many forms of low-skilled work can be found across the agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors (Standard Occupational Classification [SOC], 2020), cab driving was of particular interest in the context of this study for four key reasons. First, it is a substantial and worldwide trade with a long history. Over 350 000 cab drivers are employed in England alone, working in locations ranging from rural districts to large metropolitan centres (Department for Transport, 2018; IBIS World, 2019). The modern-day industry has its roots in the development of motorised vehicles at the turn of the 20th century (Georgano & Munro, 2011). Since then, customers have been able to hire such a vehicle and a dedicated driver to convey them to an agreed destination (Law Commission, 2014). In England, the trade has been shaped by a combination of national and local state licensing arrangements, which regulate the nature of the hiring agreement with customers, the type of vehicles that can be used and the assessment of driver skills (Butcher, 2016). This legislation has given rise to two key services: the pre-booking of a minicab, or the hire of a taxi from either the street or a designated taxi rank (Department for Transport, 2019). The sample group for this study includes participants who have worked either as minicab or taxi drivers, as well as others who had transitioned between these two services as their careers unfolded.

Second, the cab driving trade has been identified as low status and dirty work. It has been classified typically as low-skilled work because only a basic level of prior education and work skills are required to perform the role's key tasks

(SOC, 2020). Furthermore, it has been consistently ranked in a low position in terms of occupational prestige, reflecting the minimal education requirements and poor remuneration levels that characterise this work (Jones & McMillan, 2001). In some classification systems, the practical 'driving' element of the role has resulted in cab driving being categorised as manual or blue-collar work, alongside occupations such as lorry driving (SOC, 2020). However, cab driving has also been identified as a service role with the potential to be constructed as dirty work, because of the servile positioning of the cab driver in their relationship with customers (Ashforth et al., 2007; Cassell & Bishop, 2014). Whilst some studies have investigated the coping strategies employed by individuals undertaking low-skilled, dirty work such as refuse collection and care work (Bosmans et al., 2016; Simpson et al., 2014; Stacey, 2005), few have explored the construction of careers over time in this type of setting. Locating this study in the cab driving trade therefore provided an opportunity to understand better the experience of transitioning into and constructing a career in both a low-skilled and stigmatised occupation.

Third, the cab driving trade has a long history of precarious work arrangements. In England, self-employment in this occupation has predominated for decades, with three-quarters of cab drivers traditionally operating as 'one-man bands,' or contracted on a self-employed basis by a cab company (People 1st, 2016). Additionally, some contemporary cab services are associated with the growing gig economy (Stewart, 2017). This term is used to describe non-standard employment arrangements (CIPD, 2017), but is also attributed more specifically to work contracted through computer software platforms (Harding et al., 2016). In the cab trade, the latter underpins the rapid contemporary development of cab services such as Uber and Lyft, which use software applications to directly connect self-employed cab drivers with passengers (He & Shen, 2015). However, the gig economy has proved controversial, triggering challenges in court about the precarious contractual status of gig workers (Walters, 2017), whilst at the same time generating some reports of high job satisfaction levels associated with contractual flexibility (CIPD, 2015). By investigating the cab driving trade, this study engages with these policy debates and provides insights into both negative and positive experiences of working in a contractually precarious low-skilled occupation.

Finally, I was able to draw on personal contacts in order to recruit participants from a potentially hard-to-reach population. Lower socioeconomic groups in general are reportedly less willing to participate in research programs (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2018). Furthermore, the cab driving population is characterised by additional features which can present recruitment challenges. In particular, approximately 90% of cab drivers are male and a third are from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background (People 1st, 2016), which are both known to be more difficult groups to recruit from for research purposes (Ellard Gray et al., 2015: Kristensen & Ravn, 2015). Furthermore, prior investigations of the cab driving trade have reported that this population are often wary of discussing their work with 'outsiders' (Elaluf Calderwood, 2009; Galvin, 2016). As a starting point, I therefore approached and interviewed cab drivers in my home locality who I knew personally. I then employed a snowball sampling process (Goodman, 2011), which enabled me to build a sample group of participants living across my home county district and working as cab drivers in rural areas and towns outside London, as well as in the capital city itself.

1.5 Thesis Structure

In order to provide an overview of the thesis structure, a short summary of each chapter is provided here:

Chapter 2 Career and Low-Skilled Work

This chapter identifies how both low-skilled work and career are defined for the purpose of this thesis. Key literature associated with career patterns, career success and career identity is reviewed in order to assess what is known about low-skilled careers and highlight limitations with this research. A case is then made for employing a more comprehensive conceptual approach to understand better how individuals construct subjective careers in a low-skill setting.

Chapter 3 Career, Narratives and Boundaries

This chapter sets out how career, narrative and boundaries are conceptualised in the context of this thesis. The particular ways in which career can be understood as both a narrative and a boundary crossing process are explored. This chapter then explains how a career narrative can be conceived of as shaped by career boundaries and the value in doing so in order to examine complex, subjective career experiences. Finally, the research questions are specified and discussed.

Chapter 4 Research Context

In order to provide background about the research context, this chapter draws on academic literature, policy and commercial reports, as well as career materials to examine key definitions and characteristics of cab driving work. This material is then discussed from both a career narrative and career boundary perspective.

Chapter 5 Research Methods

This chapter outlines the rationale for the research design. The data collection process is explained, including the building of the sample group, undertaking interviews and transcription. The chapter goes on to describe two stages of data analysis: thematic analysis and narrative plotline analysis.

Chapter 6 Results: Thematic Analysis

The findings from the first stage of data analysis, which used a thematic analysis approach, are identified. A core set of salient career boundaries was identified: the occupation boundary, intra-occupation boundaries (job, organisation) and personal boundaries (cab driver/customer, cab driving work/life). These are examined in turn to illustrate the different ways in which they were perceived in the context of the broader career narrative.

Chapter 7 Results: Narrative Analysis

The findings from the second stage of data analysis, which used a narrative plotline analysis approach, are described. Eight different regressive, cyclical and progressive plotline types are identified, along with the salient boundary processes that shaped each one. An overview of each narrative plotline type is provided and illustrated with an in-depth analysis of an associated exemplar.

Chapter 8 Discussion and Conclusions

Finally, the thesis discusses key findings from the thematic and narrative analysis in the context of the extant academic literature. Key theoretical, policy and practice, as well as method contributions to knowledge are identified. Limitations to this study are also discussed and recommendations for further research are made. The conclusion draws together and summarises the aims underpinning this study, the rationale for the research design, key findings and their originality and value.

1.6 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has identified how the thesis aims to contribute to the under-researched topic of constructing a subjective career in a low-skilled occupation. It has outlined the approach taken by this study, which explores how cab drivers' career narratives are shaped by career boundaries. In doing so, the thesis seeks to provide new insights into the critical role of career boundaries in shaping the construction of different types of career narratives in the low-skilled sector. This chapter has also identified how the initial idea for this thesis arose from my career counselling practitioner work and the implications of that role for undertaking this research. Additionally, it has clarified the rationale for investigating career experiences in the long-standing cab driving trade, which has also become the subject of contemporary policy debate as part of the gig economy. Finally, an overview of the thesis structure has been provided by outlining a summary of the chapters that now follow.

CHAPTER 2 CAREER AND LOW-SKILLED WORK

2.1 Introduction

Whilst definitions of career have widened to include all work experiences (Gunz et al., 2020), research still focuses primarily on the careers of a skilled elite (Baruch et al., 2016). As a result, the career field continues to neglect low-skilled occupations, in spite of the fact that many have long-established histories (Hughes et al., 2017) and employ substantial numbers of people (Hebson et al., 2015). This chapter sets out to consider how this situation has arisen, examine what existing research can tell us about low-skilled career experiences and highlight key gaps in our knowledge. It then identifies the particular ways in which this thesis aims to address these shortcomings.

In terms of structuring this review, the chapter begins by outlining how the literature was gathered and mapped out. This is necessary because the topic of low-skilled careers lacks a single, substantive or coherent body of research, which presented a challenge in terms of how best to source and organise relevant literature. The way in which this was achieved via a narrative literature review is therefore set out here. The concept of low-skilled work is then explored. This includes engaging with a confusing array of terminology, in order to clarify how low-skilled work is defined for the purpose of this thesis. The key features of the low-skilled sector that have resulted in it being characterised as problematic work are then identified: its routinised nature, poor pay rates, precarious contracts and low status. Key labour market trends are also examined, which identify an increase in many types of low-skilled jobs in the UK and highlight the importance of understanding career experiences in this sector better.

The review then moves on to examine reports from low-skilled workers not only of career challenges, but also sometimes of career satisfaction. As the latter seems at odds with what appears on the face of it unrewarding work, this apparent contradiction is explored. Key conceptualisations of career as both an objective and subjective phenomenon are examined first. The ways in which low-skilled work has been investigated from three different perspectives are then considered: career patterns, career success and career identity. This process highlights the potential for low-skilled work to be perceived as a career in markedly different ways. However, key limitations with the fragmented nature of existing research are also identified. The review concludes by proposing that the complexities of low-skilled career experiences might be investigated more comprehensively by drawing upon contemporary conceptualisations of both career narratives and career boundaries.

2.2 Mapping the Literature

Preliminary searches identified two extremes in terms of volumes of literature associated with career and low-skilled work issues. On the one hand, generic online searches for ‘low-skilled work’ uncovered thousands of sources. This indicated considerable research interest in the sector but required careful sifting to identify career-related studies. On the other hand, more focused searches using terms such as ‘low-skilled career’ uncovered a relatively small number of sources. This was interesting as it underlined the dearth of research investigating low-skilled work from any explicit career perspective. Relying solely on this narrow approach was problematic though, as it risked excluding sources that might have useful things to say about career, even if they were reporting on other issues in the low-skilled sector. The process that was finally devised unfolded in stages, working out from a small core of career-focused literature and then gradually adding in relevant studies from the broader low-skilled work literature. It therefore took the form of an evolutionary narrative review, rather than a pre-defined systematic approach (Hart, 2018). This enabled the literature searches to be undertaken in an informed way, with each stage guiding the next. The process is summarised here and detailed in Appendix 1.

Seminal career textbooks proved a useful starting point for this review. Some include chronological histories (Gunz et al., 2020), which offered helpful frameworks for tracking the ebb and flow of interest in low-skilled work over time. Others provide their own definitions of career, which helped to identify how conceptualisations of career have evolved and their varied degrees of inclusivity (Arnold, 1997; Arthur et al., 1989; Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2018). Edited books highlighted how low-skilled career research is undertaken across academic disciplines such as psychology, sociology and organisational studies (Collin & Young, 2000). The temporal range of textbooks also helped to identify key bodies of research ranging from Barley's (1989) review of the Chicago School's early studies of socially marginalised occupation groups, to contemporary interest in investigating low-skilled work from a social justice perspective (Hooley et al., 2018). Some textbooks also contained chapters which have become oft-cited sources in low-skilled studies, such as Thomas' (1989) theorising about blue-collar careers, or Guest and Sturges' (2007) classification of non-managerial careers. Collectively, career textbooks underlined the need to seek out low-skilled career research across both time and different disciplines, which helped to inform the subsequent stages of this review.

The next step investigated contemporary academic journals. A tight focus was kept initially on specialist career journals, but high-ranking journals from other disciplines that address career issues regularly were then included. Searches took the form of reading abstracts published over the previous five years to identify research with a low-skilled career focus. The bibliographies of relevant papers and subsequent citations were then followed-up. This process helped to identify sources addressing topical career issues in the low-skilled sector including career patterns (e.g. Brown, 2016; Guest & Sturges, 2007; Lucas & Buzanell, 2004), career success (e.g. Cillo et al., 2019; Hardy & Sanders, 2015; Hennequin, 2007) and career identity (e.g. Clarke & Ravenswood, 2019; Lucas, 2011). Additionally, it highlighted occasional clusters of research focusing on specific types of work such as transport drivers (e.g. Bishop et al., 2009; Cassell & Bishop, 2014; Jones et al., 2014; Thomas, 1989) and the care sector (e.g. Hebson, 2015, Stacey, 2005; Skills for Care, 2007). Searching these journals also uncovered useful research that, whilst it was not explicitly career-focused, had relevance for this study such as notions of dirty work (e.g. Bosmans et al.,

2016; Hughes et al., 2017; Simpson et al., 2014) and job crafting (e.g. Akkermans & Tims, 2017; Nielson & Abildgaard, 2012). Mapping out sources by topic in this way helped to give some shape to the fragmented nature of the low-skilled career literature.

Online databases were interrogated next, using search terms that were informed by the prior investigation of contemporary journals. Searches were undertaken across key databases covering literature from different disciplines, ranging from APA PsycINFO to Business Source Premier and the Social Sciences Citation Index (Web of Science). Searches for 'career' were undertaken in conjunction with the term 'low-skilled,' as well as related terms including unskilled, semi-skilled, blue-collar, manual and dirty work. Searches were also undertaken for specific topics such as career pattern, career success and career identity in conjunction with 'low-skilled.' Finally, generic searches for relevant occupation groups such as taxi/cab driver, bus driver and lorry driver were carried out. These identified occupation-specific research, which provided useful contextual information about issues such as contractual status, technology and safety. In all of these cases, abstracts were checked and relevant bibliographies and citations followed-up to identify related sources. This process helped to build the literature base beyond the hand searches of contemporary journals, including more historic studies and research across a wider range of academic disciplines.

Searches were then extended beyond peer-reviewed academic research to access relevant grey literature. This was necessary because low-skilled work, and related career issues, have been the subject of wider investigation by organisations such as national government, policy institutes (e.g. Joseph Rowntree Foundation), professional bodies (e.g. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development [CIPD]) and trade unions (e.g. Unite the Union). Sources were identified initially through bibliographies and citations from earlier searches, but then supplemented by google searches. This process uncovered investigations into low-skilled work in sectors such as retail (Green et al., 2014), as well as specific labour groups that feature in this sector such as migrants (Migrant Advisory Committee, 2014). It also identified studies concerned with topical debates associated with low-skilled work such as labour market

forecasts (Bakhshi et al., 2017), low pay issues (Low Pay Commission, 2016), precarious work (CIPD, 2018) and the gig economy (Fleming, 2017). This broader grey literature was particularly helpful in offering a policy context for the thesis.

The stages outlined here represent the initial search strategy used prior to the fieldwork, but tracking down relevant sources then continued throughout the research process. This included using journal and citation alerts to identify newly published sources as the study unfolded. It also included attending academic conferences that offered opportunities to engage with emerging research associated with issues such as the gig economy and social justice (e.g. National Institute for Career Education and Counselling, 2019). Additionally, public debates about topics such as the nature of 'good work' (Taylor et al., 2017) and the re-designation of many low-skilled workers as 'keyworkers' during the Covid-19 pandemic (General, Municipal, Boilermakers' and Allied Trade Union [GMB], 2020) provided new perspectives for the research as it unfolded. The data analysis and writing-up stages of this thesis also involved an iterative process of revisiting the literature and sometimes extending searches to clarify and expand on key topics. Far from being a one-off event, searching and mapping the low-skilled career literature was a recurrent process, which helped to inform the early development of this study and was then itself refined by the research results and write-up.

2.3 The Nature of Low-skilled Work

Whilst the term 'low-skilled work' is in widespread use, its precise nature is the subject of considerable debate. Terminology and definitions vary and are inconsistent. Furthermore, whilst it is portrayed typically in both the career field and wider society as problematic work, there are seemingly paradoxical reports of individuals constructing meaningful careers in the low-skilled sector. These issues are examined here with a view to clarifying definitions, exploring key facets of low-skilled work and their potential implications from a career perspective.

2.3.1 Definitions

The notion of skill is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon (Nickson & Baxter-Reid, 2017). It has been defined in the workplace as a ‘competence or proficiency - the ability to do something well’ (National Skills Task Force, 2000, p. 11). Classification systems then often further subdivide work roles according to different facets of skill such as type and level. Generic skill types include literacy, numeracy and problem solving that are transferable across different work roles (Green, 2011). More specialist skill types may also be attributed to particular work roles, including ‘hard’ technical skills and ‘soft’ relational skills (Nickson & Baxter-Reid, 2017). Additionally, these various types of work skills may be differentiated by level. This attempts to reflect that some skills require more complex knowledge, experience and judgement than others, with the development of higher-level skills demanding additional training and taking longer to acquire (Kukzera et al., 2016). Individual work roles then require a specific skill set - a combination of a particular group of skill types and levels (CIPD, 2018). In order to work as a cab driver, for example, driving skills and customer service skills are key and will be discussed in detail in the research context chapter.

Classifying skills by level is not straightforward though and has resulted in problems with defining low-skilled work. The term ‘low-skilled work’ is often used in public debate without any recourse to a precise definition, but even within the research literature there is inconsistency in how it is applied (Wright & Sissons, 2012). From an international perspective, one reason for this is that different countries develop their own versions of skill taxonomies, which can vary in terms of both the number of skill levels that they define and the types of jobs that are allocated to them (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017). National taxonomies themselves also usually rely on proxies for skill level, such as types of education and training or years of work experience, that offer convenient but imprecise and localised measures (Standard Occupational Classification [SOC], 2020). Moreover, these taxonomies can become outdated quickly, which means that new types of jobs in rapidly evolving sectors may remain unclassified until the taxonomy is reviewed again (Djumalieva et al., 2018). As a result of differences between skill

taxonomies, it is therefore hard to pin down any single, consistent definition of low-skilled work that is recognised universally.

In spite of its limitations though, the UK's own government taxonomy offers a useful framework for exploring definition issues. This is because many studies define low-skilled work in different ways on the basis of this particular taxonomy. It is known as the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC, 2020) and divides nine key occupation groups across four hierarchical skill levels (Table 2.1). The skill levels are differentiated on the basis of 'the time taken to gain necessary formal qualifications, or the required amount of work-based training' in order to undertake a job competently (SOC, 2020, p. 2). The lowest skill level requires a 'general education,' that equates to General Certificate of Secondary Education qualifications achieved during the first stage of secondary school (Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation, 2020), as well as a short period of on-the-job training. The next level requires a similar general education, but an additional period of on-the-job training and/or work experience and it is here that cab driving work is classified. The third and fourth skill levels demand far more substantive education and training, including occupations such as apprenticed trades and those requiring degree and post-graduate level qualifications. This comprehensive taxonomy is updated every ten years and is used extensively as a basis for monitoring labour market trends, mapping skill profiles and identifying skill mismatches between jobs and workers (Diumalieva et al, 2018).

Within the UK, a variety of definitions associated with low-skilled work are based on the SOC (2020) framework. The most common distinction is to differentiate occupations falling within the first and second levels as low-skilled work, whilst the third and fourth levels are deemed high-skilled or simply 'skilled' work (Wright & Sissons, 2012). This is because the third and fourth levels require substantively more qualifications, training and work experience beyond a basic education. However, some studies differentiate the first level as 'unskilled' work and limit the use of the term low-skilled work to occupations in the second level (Green, 2011). The third level has also sometimes been categorised as 'semi-skilled' work and the fourth level as 'high-skilled' work (Sumption & Fernandez-Rino, 2018). In a further complication, research has

occasionally included a number of occupations from the third level in definitions of low-skilled work, such as apprenticed trades (Green et al., 2014). So, whilst SOC (2020) offers a widely recognised skill-based framework, the definitions of low-skilled work that are based upon it can differ from one study to another.

Whilst acknowledging these varied definitions, the broader binary distinction made between low and high-skilled work based upon SOC (2020) is adopted as the most useful starting-point for this thesis for two key reasons. First, combining the two lower levels of this classification together as low-skilled work is a simple and widely understood approach that underpins the greater majority of definitions used by researchers (Wright & Sissons, 2012). The only key distinction between these two lower levels is that second level occupations require a short period of work experience, beyond a general education. Second, the types of work that fall within these two lower tiers share common features that have important implications from a career perspective and are discussed in the following section: routine work tasks, low pay, insecure contractual arrangements and low status. However, whilst this definition of low-skilled work is the one adopted at the outset of the thesis as a means of clarifying terms, these definition issues are revisited in the final chapter of this thesis in the light of the data analysis.

Table 2.1 Skill Levels

(Adapted from Standard Occupational Classification, 2020)

SKILL LEVEL	DEFINITION	OCCUPATIONS
4	Occupations at this top level usually require a degree or equivalent period of relevant work experience. Includes senior positions in corporate enterprises and government bodies.	• Managers, Directors, Senior Officials • Professional Occupations e.g. Accountant, Engineer, Nurse, Teacher
3	Occupations require knowledge associated with post-compulsory education, but not usually to degree level. Some jobs at this level will not require formal qualifications or vocational training, but will instead require a significant period of work experience.	• Associate Professional & Technical • Protective Services • Skilled Trades e.g. Carpenter, Lab Technician, Prison Officer, Veterinary Nurse
2	Occupations require same level of competence associated with a general education as Level 1. However, jobs at Level 2 require a longer period of on-the-job training and/or work experience.	• Administrative Occupations • Caring & Leisure Occupations • Sales & Customer Service • Process, Plant & Machine e.g. **Cab Driver**, Machine Operator, Care Worker, Retail Worker
1	Occupations at this lowest level require competence associated with a general education, usually acquired during first stage of secondary school. Jobs at this skill level may require short periods of on-the-job-training and knowledge of health and safety regulations.	• Elementary Occupations e.g. Postal Worker, Hotel Porter, Cleaner, Catering Assistant

2.3.2 Characteristic Features

Low-skilled occupations such as cab driving have in common a number of key features. The first concerns the fact that low-skilled work can incorporate a substantial proportion of both routine and supervised tasks. Routine work entails an individual performing simple and repetitive tasks, whilst non-routine work involves more complex problem solving and decision making (Urtasun & Nunez, 2012). Low-skilled occupations have been described as 'routine intensive,' because they involve undertaking a high proportion of tasks that follow a clearly prescribed set of rules, or procedures (OECD, 2016, p. 1). Furthermore, whilst some low-skilled work is relatively unsupervised and autonomous, the majority is monitored closely by either a line manager (Hodson & Sullivan, 2012), or increasingly via technological surveillance (Holland & Bardoel, 2016). As a result, undertaking work in the low-skilled sector has been associated with issues such as boredom, a lack of challenge and constraint (Barnes et al., 2016).

Low-skilled work is also characterised by poor pay rates. This arises because the economic worth of low-level skills in the labour market is typically less, in comparison to the relative scarcity of high-level specialist skills (Paradeise, 2003; Schmueker, 2014). Low pay is defined in the UK as 'hourly earnings below two-thirds of the median hourly wage' and can be insufficient to enable people to meet even basic living costs (D'Arcy & Finch, 2017, p. 5). This in turn can result in individuals who are employed in occupations such as cab driving having to work long hours to achieve a living wage or taking on second jobs in order to make ends meet (Low Pay Commission, 2016). Concern about pay rates associated with low-skilled work in the UK were sufficient to result in the introduction of a National Minimum Wage in 1999, in an attempt to ameliorate such problems (Pyper, 2014). In spite of this, contemporary reports continue to draw attention to rising levels of 'in-work poverty,' ranging from challenges with covering the cost of food and housing, to problems with chronic debt (McBride et al., 2018, p. 210).

In recent years, low-skilled work has also been identified increasingly as precarious work that forms part of the contemporary gig economy (Stewart,

2017). The term ‘gig’ refers to employment in which there is contractual insecurity and includes casual work, temporary work, agency work, zero hours contracts and self-employment (CIPD, 2015; Bujold & Fournier, 2008). There has been a steady increase in such contractual arrangements in recent years as the UK’s labour market has become more deregulated (Gallie et al., 2016), but this has been most prevalent in the low-skilled sector (Spreizter et al., 2017). For example, whilst levels of self-employment have risen across the labour market (CIPD, 2018; Office for National Statistics, 2014), the majority of work in low-skilled occupations is now contracted in this way (Frontier Economics, 2013). The term gig work has also been applied more specifically to contemporary employment such as cab driving that can be contracted on a self-employed basis through computer software platforms (Fleming, 2017). This new system of contracting for work has impacted disproportionately upon low-skilled occupations such as transport services (CIPD, 2017). Traditional job security has therefore been eroded, raising concern about issues such as high stress levels associated with unpredictable contractual arrangements (Gallie et al., 2016; Lewchuck et al., 2008).

Low-skilled work including cab driving has also been equated with low social status, because ‘occupations low in prestige require little education, pay poorly, involve simple tasks, are directed by others and require little cognitive ability’ (Gottfredson, 1996). Frameworks such as the UK’s SOC (2020) directly link low-skilled occupations with lower social groups (McDonald & Dunbar, 2010). Moreover, low-skilled work is often associated with notions of dirty work, as a result of undertaking either stigmatised tasks, or working in an unclean environment (Kreiner et al., 2006). Low-skilled occupations in the service sector such as care work may also be perceived as dirty work, because they include assisting people with personal care tasks (Stacey, 2005). As a result, individuals may have difficulty constructing a positive work identity in such occupation settings (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Diemer & Ali, 2009).

The features outlined here highlight why low-skilled jobs such as cab driving have often been regarded as problematic work, both at the level of the individual and wider society. Furthermore, whilst each of these features might be challenging in their own right, collectively they suggest that low-skilled work

may offer little in the way of adequate income, job security or satisfaction and may even be regarded as undesirable and harmful (Kalleberg, 2009). These issues have proved the subject of much contemporary debate within the UK, as a result of growth in the low-skilled sector, which the following section goes on to examine in more detail.

2.3.3 Labour Market Trends

The UK's labour market is comprised of a disproportionately large number of low-skilled jobs compared to other developed countries (Whittaker & Hurrell, 2013). Over a third of those in employment undertake low-skilled work (Office for National Statistics, 2020). This situation has arisen as a result of factors such as national deregulation policies in the workplace, as well as the decreasing influence of trade unions (Prosser, 2016). This context has encouraged companies offering primarily low-skilled employment to set-up or relocate to the UK, as well as the conversion of many existing jobs in this sector to less secure contracts (Taylor et al., 2017). Moreover, the number of low-skilled jobs is forecast to continue to rise over the next decade, particularly in the service sector (Bakhshi et al., 2017) and including cab driving (IBISWorld, 2019). Low-skilled work is therefore set to remain a substantial component of the national labour market for the foreseeable future.

These trends have raised concerns about the UK labour market. Not least is that a proliferation of so-called 'lousy jobs' in the low-skilled sector offering poor pay and precarious contracts depresses earnings (Goos & Manning, 2007, p. 118). There is concern particularly for marginalised labour groups which form a disproportionately high proportion of low-skilled occupations (Migrant Advisory Committee, 2014; Wilson & Maume, 2014). For example, migrants may lack key qualifications and social networks to access higher level work roles (Hakak & Ariss, 2013), whilst women may take on low-skilled jobs to accommodate domestic commitments (Bosmans et al., 2016). Contemporary labour shortages have also been reported in the low-skilled sector (Bakhshi et al., 2017). This situation is likely to be exacerbated by Brexit, if the number of migrants entering the UK falls and a key source of low-skilled workers is thereby reduced (Migrant

Advisory Committee, 2018). At the same time, problems have been identified with the under-utilisation of skills, which arises when individuals work in a low-skilled occupation for which they are overqualified (Wright & Sissons, 2012). Growing numbers of low-skilled jobs therefore have the potential to raise challenges for the UK economy and those working in this sector.

These concerns are being addressed at a national level in a variety of different ways. The UK government itself commissioned a wide-ranging review of modern working practices with the aim of promoting 'good work' across the labour market: through fair contractual arrangements, training and career progression opportunities (Taylor et al., 2017). Other national bodies such as economic think tanks, professional and charitable organisations have undertaken research seeking to address issues such as raising household incomes (Davis et al., 2018), upskilling (Kuczera et al., 2016) and improving social mobility (D'Arcy & Finch, 2017). Trade unions have taken direct action, by funding a number of high-profile legal cases against employers, which have resulted in some improvements to precarious contractual arrangements, particularly those associated with gig employment contracted via online platforms (GMB, 2018). Both research and government policy have therefore sought to find ways to address the undoubted problems that low-skilled workers can experience.

2.3.4 Career Experiences

Whilst the literature has reported extensively on the notable challenges that many low-skilled workers face, there are also some reports of positive job and career experiences. The benefits to employers of precarious work contracts in terms of labour flexibility are clear, but some low-skilled workers themselves state a preference for what they perceive of as usefully flexible employment arrangements (Spreitzer et al., 2017). Research has also reported instances of job satisfaction levels in the low-skilled sector akin to the working population as a whole (CIPD, 2015a). Additionally, there are occasional accounts of long-term and rewarding careers being constructed in low-skilled settings such as the care work sector (Hebson et al., 2015) and the hospitability industry (Mooney et al.,

2016). Whilst such studies are infrequent, they indicate that personal experiences of undertaking low-skilled work may be more complex and nuanced than might be expected.

However, relatively little is known about the subjective career in the context of low-skilled work, as research has typically prioritised investigating the personal work experiences of those in the skilled sector (Koekemoer et al., 2019). At the same time, the fact that the low-skilled sector employs one in three people in the UK and is growing suggests an urgent imperative to understand their individual career experiences better (Mooney et al., 2016). This thesis therefore aims to provide a timely response to calls to investigate how individuals interpret low-skilled work from a career perspective (Brown, 2016; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). The remainder of this chapter now goes on to examine career experiences in the context of the low-skilled sector, with a view to assessing what is known and identifying any limitations with existing research.

2.4 Career and Low-skilled Work

The nature of a career can be understood by both society and individuals in many different ways. The reasons for this and a variety of key conceptualisations are explored here. This includes identifying characteristic features of career and clarifying how it is defined for the purpose of this thesis. Career issues in the context of the low-skilled sector are then considered in more detail from three perspectives: career patterns, career success and career identity. These issues stood out from the initial literature searches as pertinent topics in the context of this thesis, because they have attracted limited but useful research attention in low-skilled settings (Table 2.2). This section of the review considers each of these literatures in turn, with a view to establishing the extent to which they inform our understanding of low-skilled career experiences and how they might vary.

Table 2.2 Low-Skilled Work: Career Theory Perspectives

CAREER THEORY	TRADITIONAL ASSUMPTIONS	EVOLVING RESEARCH
CAREER PATTERNS	Objective conceptualisations of low-skilled work as careerless: - no hierarchical pathways - formless job-hopping	Subjective hierarchical patterns in low-skilled settings based on: - nuanced work roles *(Belt, 2004; Hollowell, 1968; Scott, 1994)* - length of service *(Thomas, 1989)* - bravery/endurance *(Lucas & Buzanell, 2004)* - prior work *(Stacey, 2005)* Subjective career patterns *(Guest & Sturges, 2007*): - upward organisational career - work not a central activity - career mobility as variety - creating interest in current job
CAREER SUCCESS	Objective conceptualisations of low-skilled work as unsuccessful: - lack of tangible achievements - no opportunities for promotion, pay rise, or increasing social status	Subjective career success in low-skilled settings based on personal material, psychological & social criteria *(Hennequin, 2007)* Take-up of up low-skilled work as part of longer-term strategy to achieve subjective career success in the future *(Alberti, 2014; Hardy & Sanders 2015)* Achieve subjective career success through job-crafting as a means of improving day-to-day work and future employability *(Akkermans & Tims, 2017)*
CAREER IDENTITY	Objective perceptions of difficulties with constructing positive career identity: - low status - dirty, stigmatised work	Construct a positive career identity through 'reframing, recalibrating and refocusing' *(Ashforth et al., 1999: Clarke & Ravenswood, 2019)* Develop adaptive coping strategies to manage stigma *(Bosmans et al., 2016)* Positive juxta-position in relation to outgroups *(Lucas 2011)*

2.4.1 Conceptualising Career

In its most abstract sense, career has been defined as ‘movement (of an object or person) through time and (social) space’ (Collin, 2006, p. 62). It was applied in this way by the Chicago School of Sociology’s early researchers to the unfolding life experiences of groups ranging from criminals, to the homeless and those suffering from chronic illness (Shaw, 1930). Subsequently though, the term became associated more specifically with the movement of an individual through ‘occupational or organisational space’ (Collin, 2006, p. 62), thereby associating it directly with the world of work. The notion of movement through time emphasises that career is not just concerned with the undertaking of a single job, but rather any ‘series of jobs’ that unfold during the course an individual’s working life (Barley, 1989, p. 47). The idea of movement through social space draws attention to both the work roles that individuals occupy over time and the transitions that they make between them (Maranda & Comeau, 2000). Career has therefore become understood broadly as a work-related, temporal and social phenomenon.

Beyond this though, career has been conceptualised in a multiplicity of ways. In part, this arises from the fact that an array of stakeholders each approach the notion of career from different perspectives (Baruch et al., 2015). As a result, definitions vary between academic disciplines such as psychology, sociology, organisation and management studies, which each conceptualise career from a different focus of interest and theoretical position (Khapova & Arthur, 2011). The term career is also used widely in daily life by individuals, as well as educators, recruiters, employers and governments who all have different vested interests in how working life and associated notions of career are represented (Young & Colin, 2000). Additionally, new types of career have been identified as a result of changing economic, political, social and technological circumstances (Arnold & Cohen, 2008). These include boundaryless careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1994), protean careers (Hall, 1976; 2002), kaleidoscope careers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006) and flexible careers (Tomlinson et al., 2018). Conceptualisations of career therefore not only abound but continue to change over time.

In seeking to clarify a definition of career for the purpose of this study, this review takes as its starting point the idea that it concerns 'the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time' (Arthur et al., 1989, p. 8). Devised for the publication of the seminal 'Handbook of Career Theory,' this definition has stood the test of time by being adopted subsequently in other key texts including Gunz and Peiperl's (2007) 'Handbook of Career Studies' and Inkson et al.'s (2015) 'Understanding Careers.' This widely used definition draws attention to both the sequential and temporal nature of career. It also refers generically to 'work experiences,' thereby inferring that a career can be understood to unfold in any occupation setting, including the low-skilled sector. This definition is therefore important in the context of this thesis, because it acknowledges that low-skilled work experiences can be investigated from a career perspective.

Another key issue that has relevance for this study is the distinction made between the objective and subjective career. The objective career describes that which is 'observable, measurable and verifiable' such as work histories and pay rates (Dries et al., 2008 p. 254). However, the subjective career places the individual centre-stage and is concerned with the meaning that they attribute themselves to their unfolding work experiences (Collin, 2006). Whilst research has been based traditionally on objective notions of career, in recent years growing attention has been paid to the subjective career (Dokko et al., 2020). This has been supported by philosophical developments that have evolved beyond the positivist paradigm, such as constructivist conceptualisations of career as narrative that are rooted in how individuals perceive their working lives (Savickas, 2012). Whilst some propose that the objective and subjective career are best understood as distinct phenomena (Dries, 2011), others argue that they can be conceived of as inter-dependent in the sense that one may influence the other (Khapova et al., 2007). Both objective and subjective notions of career have important implications for this study, because they highlight distinctly different ways in which the careers of low-skilled workers have been conceptualised. The following section therefore goes on to explore and clarify these perspectives further, by reviewing some of the different ways in which low-skilled work has been investigated as a career.

2.4.2 Career Theory Perspectives

As the opening section of this chapter identified, the process of mapping out the literature identified three pertinent research streams addressing career experiences in the low-skilled sector. These concern career patterns, career success and career identity. These issues all have relevance in the context of this thesis, because associated research has begun to uncover how low-skilled workers may perceive different types of career pattern, degrees of career success and varied forms of career identity. Collectively, these three streams of literature therefore offer insights into understanding both the nature of careers in a low-skilled setting, as well as any variation in terms of their outcomes (Table 2.2). Each research stream is therefore examined here in turn, with a view to assessing how they can inform this thesis, as well as any inherent limitations.

2.4.2.1 Career Patterns

As an individual's work experiences unfold over time, they form patterns that reflect 'the number, duration, and sequence of jobs in the work history' (Savickas, 2001, p. 54). Career research has then taken an interest in the different types of patterns that can evolve (Dlouhy et al., 2020). Traditionally, the term career has been applied to one particular pattern involving an individual's progression over time up through a series of increasingly high-status job roles. This idea prevailed in academic settings during the middle decades of the 20th century (Moore et al., 2007), as exemplified in Wilensky's (1961, p. 523) definition of career as 'a succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige through which persons move in an ordered (more or less predictable) sequence.' However, this particular understanding of career also remains pervasive in wider sociey (Collin, 2006). This is illustrated by the Oxford English Dictionary's (2020) contemporary definition of the term as 'a course of professional life or employment, which affords opportunity for progress or advancement in the world.' This particular conceptualisation of career therefore refers to a specific type of career pattern involving hierarchical

progression, increasing remuneration, professional accreditation and high social status.

The idea of career as a hierarchical ladder has had important consequences. From an academic perspective, it resulted for many years in theory and empirical research focusing on a narrow subset of the workforce that undertake careers featuring 'limited entry and selective progress along recognisable paths' (Young & Collin, 2000, p. 3). Such research was underpinned by the assumption that careers unfolded in an orderly and linear fashion along well-established routes associated with longstanding occupations and large, stable organisations (Clarke, 2013). As a result, research prioritised the investigation of observable issues such as promotional transitions, ranging from the initial entry into an organisation or occupation, to hierarchical career moves up into managerial roles (Chudzikowski, 2012). Additionally, there was a research focus on differentiating and developing managerial and leadership skills (Yukl, 2012). Career theory and empirical research were therefore rooted in issues that were specific to hierarchical career patterns and could be measured objectively.

The narrow conceptualisation of career as hierarchical advancement has also impacted beyond the research context. On the one hand, it has come to represent an idealised notion of career (Inkson et al., 2015), an aspirational phenomenon that can be achieved by anyone in a meritocratic society over time through 'education, effort and social mobility' (Young & Collin, 2000 p. 3). On the other hand, career may be perceived as the prerogative of a privileged minority, beyond the reach of those 'constrained by financial, time and family commitments… or a lack of the necessary skills to succeed in higher education' (Packard & Babineau, 2009 p. 207). Research has also identified how an individual's social network may circumscribe aspirations (Gottfredson, 2005) and limit access to skilled jobs (Lent et al., 2000). So, whilst an individual may aspire to a hierarchical career, a complex array of factors may prevent them from fulfilling such a goal.

Furthermore, it has been argued that elitist notions of career have become the 'norm' against which other work patterns fail to measure up (Dries, 2011, p.

364). This includes low-skilled work, which can appear devoid of career opportunities for two main reasons. First, low-skilled work hierarchies appear flat from an objective perspective, providing few promotional opportunities (Lucas & Buzanell, 2004). Second, any observable progression would seem limited by the low status ascribed to the entirety of the low-skilled sector (McDonald & Dunbar, 2010). Low-skilled work has then been identified typically at best as a useful stepping-stone into skilled roles, but at worst a trap with few career development prospects (D'Arcy & Finch, 2017). From this objective perspective, low-skilled work and the notion of career are arguably a contradiction in terms.

However, empirical evidence from a small body of qualitative research illustrates that low-skilled workers themselves may interpret their career pattern as a hierarchical pathway. One means by which this is achieved is through perceptions of nuanced status hierarchies within a low-skilled occupation. For example, a longstanding study of lorry drivers identified three types of job role ranging from low-status local delivery work, to middle-distance driving work and prestigious long-haul routes (Hollowell, 1968). Some lorry drivers then perceived transitioning through these three job roles over time as career advancement. Research interviews with factory workers also found that those who transitioned up though four manual grades interpreted this process as a hierarchical career in its own right, even if they did not progress further into managerial roles (Scott, 1994). Qualitative research undertaken in call centres even found that some call operators regarded their work as a hierarchical career, simply because of the existence of a small number of managerial roles and regardless of whether they aspired to such promotion (Belt, 2004). So, whilst a hierarchical career pattern may not be observable to those outside a low-skilled occupation, this does not preclude low-skilled workers perceiving themselves to be established on a traditional career ladder.

There is also evidence that some low-skilled workers perceive alternative status hierarchies within an occupation. For example, a narrative investigation undertaken in a mining community identified that higher status was accorded to those co-workers who had endured many years working in difficult conditions, particularly those who had displayed physical endurance and bravery in the

face of dangerous situations (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004). Similarly, Thomas' (1989, p. 375) observations of bus drivers identified how 'veteran status' was accorded to those with longer service. Furthermore, this status was rewarded by their managers who ensured that they were allocated the 'newest and most comfortable buses.' Such findings highlight how different types of localised status hierarchies may be recognised by workers within low-skilled occupations, which can offer a sense of following hierarchical career pathways.

Qualitative research has also identified that low-skilled workers may achieve a sense of career advancement by making reference to prior work experiences. By taking a grounded theory approach, Stacey (2005) investigated care workers experiences of looking after clients in the community. Her study highlighted many challenges with this work, ranging from low pay to pressure to complete client visits in a tightly prescribed timeframe. However, some of those who had previously worked as a carer in nursing homes reported a preference for community-based care work, which they perceived to offer greater opportunities for autonomy and an enhanced sense of controlling their work environment. Rather than being supervised closely as they had been in a nursing home setting, they were able to exert some degree of control over the scheduling of visiting their clients and associated work tasks. The transition into community care work could therefore be regarded as 'fleeing' the pressures of nursing home employment (Stacey, p. 831), but also had the potential to be interpreted as a form of career advancement into a preferred role.

Beyond hierarchical career pathways, researchers have identified other perceptions of low-skilled career patterns. For example, career mobility within the low-skilled sector has often been dismissed as formless job-hopping, because no objective pattern can be distinguished readily (Lyons & Schweitzer, 2015). Cited examples include frequent transitions between jobs within a single line of work such as seasonal fruit-picking (Hoey, 2006), or across a variety of different low-skilled occupations (Brown, 2016). However, Guest and Sturges' (2007) classification framework proposes four different types of career patterns in non-managerial 'routine' occupations including the low-skilled sector. Their four-fold classification is based on two dimensions. The first is concerned with whether work is undertaken within a single organisation or beyond, whilst the

second reflects the extent to which work is perceived as central or marginal to the broader life context. The resulting four categories identify perceptions of an upwardly mobile organisational career, disengagement from work as a central activity, engaging in career mobility as a means of achieving variety, or creating interest within a current job role. So, whilst low-skilled work patterns may appear formless from an objective perspective, the Guest and Sturges (2007) framework highlights different ways in which individuals themselves may perceive meaningful career pathways.

The research associated with career patterns which has been outlined here highlights contrasting ways in which low-skilled work can be perceived. Traditionally, objective notions of career as advancement have resulted in low-skilled work being widely dismissed as offering few opportunities for anything but job-hopping. However, sporadic qualitative studies that have investigated subjective perceptions of career patterns in low-skilled settings reveal more complex experiences. Whilst some low-skilled workers may perceive themselves to be simply undertaking a job, others may regard themselves as navigating up through nuanced status hierarchies or pursuing other forms of meaningful career pathway. Collectively, such research provides useful insights into the potential for perceptions of career patterns to vary from one low-skilled worker to another.

2.4.2.2 Career Success

A substantial body of research is concerned with understanding notions of success in the context of career. Career success has been defined as ‘the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person’s work experiences over time’ (Arthur et al., 2005, p. 179). In a similar way to some other career concepts discussed in this review, it can be understood to have both objective and subjective dimensions. Objective career success focuses upon tangible achievements such as a pay rise or promotion (Ng et al., 2005). In contrast, subjective career success concerns ‘the experience of achieving goals that are personally meaningful to the individual, rather than those set by parents, peers, an organization, or society’ (Mirvis & Hall, 1994, p.

366). However, research effort has focused traditionally on investigating objective measures of career success associated with hierarchical careers such as achieving salary increases, upward mobility and improved social status (Maurer & Chapman, 2013; Ng et al., 2005). In contrast, the potential to achieve objective career success in a low-skilled setting appears limited, as a result of issues such as low pay and low status.

In more recent decades, qualitative research has been deployed to investigate subjective notions of career success in the skilled sector (Dokko et al., 2020). This arose in recognition of new types of skilled careers evolving in the contemporary labour market, which deviated from traditional notions of hierarchical career pathways (Ng et al., 2005). In the absence of clear-cut objective measures of material career success in these new career settings, attention shifted to understanding how individuals themselves perceive success (Heslin, 2005). Research has then included investigating different types of personal career goals and the career orientations that underpin them. The latter have been defined as ‘career preferences shaped by the interplay between individual identity, family and social background, work experiences and labour market conditions’ (Rodrigues et al., 2013). They might include pursuing specialist vocational interests, working autonomously or funding leisure pursuits (Clarke, 2009). They may also change over time if circumstances such as job security, family responsibilities or health status change (Bown-Wilson & Parry, 2013). This illustrates how personal career goals may not only vary amongst individuals in skilled work settings, but also change over time. Furthermore, whilst some people may prioritise the achievement of one particular career goal, there is also evidence that others seek to fulfil two or more goals (Rodrigues et al., 2013).

Other research has investigated the variety of factors that may predict subjective career success in the skilled sector. For example, Ng et al. (2005) identified that subjective career success in managerial work settings is more strongly related to organisational sponsorship and individual differences. Individual perceptions of subjective career success may also be shaped by contextual issues such as culture and ideology (Dries et al., 2011), as well as career scripts that ‘set the rules’ for undertaking a particular career path

(Cappellan & Janssens, 2010, p. 689) such as an occupational (Duberley et al., 2006), promotional (Dany et al., 2011) or global career (Cappellan & Janssens, 2010). These scripts are constructed at the societal level by, for example, employers and professional bodies. They can influence career actions but may also provide a means by which individuals compare and make sense of their own unfolding work experiences (Dany et al., 2011). Barriers to achieving subjective career success have also been identified, including structural factors such as age, social class, gender and ethnicity (Forrier et al., 2009). A substantial array of theory and empirical work within the skilled sector has therefore identified that a wide range of issues impact upon personal career goals and whether or not people feel they have succeeded in achieving them.

Beyond the skilled sector though, a small body of qualitative research has identified the importance of accounting for subjective career success in low-skilled settings. In particular, research has begun to demonstrate how low-skilled workers can experience different degrees of subjective career success, arising from a complex combination of personal criteria. For example, Hennequin's (2007) grounded theory investigation of blue-collar workers identified different material, psychological and social criteria. From a material perspective, this included achieving goals such as a pay rise or gaining a staff loyalty discount, akin to objective notions of career success. Psychological criteria included developing personal work skills and expertise, whilst social criteria included developing a good reputation amongst work colleagues. The idea that individuals in low-skilled occupations may perceive career success on the basis of different career goals, just as skilled workers do, has also been borne out by other studies. This includes reports of high levels of job satisfaction arising from the availability of zero hours contracts (Wilmott, 2015) and self-employment (CIPD, 2015). Additionally, the predominantly female care sector workforce has reported valuing flexible contracts as a means of working around family commitments (Hebson, 2015; Stacey, 2005), as well as perceiving that helping others and building close relationships with clients is rewarding (Skills for Care, 2007).

A small number of studies have highlighted complex motivations for entering low-skilled work and associated interpretations of career success. A large-scale

and multi-method study of the UK lap dancing industry (Hardy & Sanders, 2015) found that it was characterised by precarious work contracts and highly variable incomes. However, whilst some were driven to enter the industry by poverty, others had opted to take up this work as part of a strategic career plan, regarding it as a means to earn a substantive income to fund 'futures of work, employment and education' (p. 119). Many did so on a part-time basis, whilst undertaking other work or higher education studies. Several individuals described having a five-year plan, which they considered the time necessary to work as a lap dancer in order to earn sufficient income to fund their longer-term plans. In a similar way, a study of migrants working in London's hospitality trade found that some perceived this as a strategic means of gaining a foothold in the workplace and improving their language skills, or supporting themselves financially through education courses (Alberti, 2014). Working in a low-skilled occupation may therefore be regarded by some as part of a longer-term strategy for achieving career success in the future.

Individuals in the low-skilled sector may also achieve a sense of subjective career success through job crafting. This process involves individuals 'proactively modifying aspects of their job to create a better person-job fit' (Tims et al., 2012, p. 170). It has traditionally been conceptualised and investigated by researchers in the context of a single work role being undertaken by an individual (Nielson & Abildgaard, 2012). More recently though, it has been proposed that job crafting may act as a mediator between the development of career competencies and career success (Akkermans & Tims, 2017). In a study of young adults undertaking a variety of both high and low skilled occupations, they found that an individual proactively undertaking job crafting could not only improve their person-job fit, but also enhance a variety of career competencies including personal knowledge, skills and abilities. This included developing the confidence to take personal responsibility for key tasks, manage multiple tasks and working more autonomously. In developing career competencies through job crafting, individuals may therefore improve their future employability and enhance an overall perception of subjective career success.

The research outlined here highlights four important points in terms of career success in the context of low-skilled work. First, whilst opportunities to achieve

career success in a low-skilled setting appear limited from an objective basis, there is evidence that individuals can attain subjective career success. Second, low-skilled workers can ascribe a variety of different meanings to being 'successful.' Whilst this might include achieving a sense of hierarchical advancement, it could also involve satisfying a complex mix of material, psychological and social criteria, which are personal to each and every individual. Third, the notion of career orientations provides insight into the complex array of factors that may influence career preferences, including whether work is regarded as intrinsically interesting and of central importance to an individual's life, or rather a means of satisfying broader life criteria. Finally, theory and empirical work highlight the potential for career goals and perceptions of career success to change over time in low-skilled settings, just as they do in the skilled sector, as a result of evolving family commitments, economic circumstances, or health and wellbeing.

2.4.2.3 Career Identity

Another key stream of research illustrates how unfolding work experiences can provide the means of constructing both positive and negative career identities. There is an extensive body of work addressing both identity issues in general (Corlett et al., 2017) and more specifically within a career context (LaPointe, 2010). In terms of definition, 'one's identity insofar as it resides in the unfolding career may be called career identity' (Hoekstra, 2011, p. 160). It concerns 'an individual's sense of who they are, who they wish to be, and their hopes, dreams, fears and frustrations' (Young & Collin, 2000, p. 5). Much theory-building and empirical work has then focused upon the construction of career identity in the context of skilled occupations (LaPointe, 2013). This includes a long-standing interest in understanding how individuals construct career identities over time associated with specific organisations and occupations (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), as well the way in which they 'construct, alter and revise their work identities' as they transition between job roles over time (Ibarra & Barbelescu, 2010). There has been less research undertaken regarding career identity in the low-skilled sector though. Rather, an assumption has been made that individuals will struggle to construct a positive career identity, as a

result of the low status of this work and its potential to be perceived as dirty work (Ashforth et al., 2007).

However, some research in the low-skilled sector suggests that career identity construction may be more nuanced and complex than has been assumed. In particular, it has been proposed that even in low-skilled jobs, individuals have 'a strong desire to construct positive, dignified work identities' (Lucas, 2011, p. 353). Investigations have then been framed largely within a social identification theory context (Kreiner et al., 2006). For example, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999, p. 413) found that occupation groups in stigmatised occupations, including those in the low-skilled sector, can construct a positive identity through social processes involving the 'reframing, recalibrating and refocusing' of that identity with fellow co-workers. These social processes could include reframing dirty work as a positive 'badge of honour' (p. 421), recalibrating it as central to the effective functioning of wider organisational goals, or refocusing upon the non-stigmatised elements of that occupation. These findings have been supported by empirical work in the care sector, which found that community care workers sought to overcome stigma by focusing on the positive aspects of their work such as close rapport with clients (Clarke & Ravenswood, 2019). Such research provides a means of understanding how some individuals construct positive career identities over time as they work in and transition between jobs in stigmatised occupations.

An investigation of domestic workers by Bosmans et al., (2016) has also uncovered how and why notions of career identity might vary within a low-skilled occupation. This study argued that domestic cleaning has typically been conceptualised as dirty work because it involves handling physical dirt itself, as well as being poorly paid, low status and servile employment. However, it found that individuals working in this occupation utilised a mix of 'maladaptive' and 'adaptive' coping strategies in order to deal with the associated stigma (p. 54), resulting in both negative and positive identity outcomes. In particular, a positive sense of self was achieved through in-group comparisons that resulted in some co-workers being regarded as less committed or effective in undertaking their role. Furthermore, some of these strategies involved making comparisons with prior work experiences such as factory work, which were perceived as relatively

less interesting and lower status roles. As a result, transitioning into domestic work could be regarded as stepping up into higher status and therefore relatively less stigmatised work, thus enabling the construction of a positive career identity.

Finally, a study of mining work examined the means by which individuals may construct a positive career identity in an occupation involving physical labour in a dangerous environment (Lucas, 2011). This was achieved by finding what the author termed 'dignity' in the workplace. Analysis of qualitative interviews with a small sample group of miners highlighted that participants considered 'all work is valuable and important, dignity is based on quality of work performed, and dignity is manifested in how people interact with one another' (p. 366). However, this study highlighted the importance of comparisons that some participants made about themselves in relation to other out-groups. In particular, many regarded themselves occupying a higher social status than occupations such as sewage workers, but lower than those of doctors and lawyers. By presenting mining in this middling position, as well as arguing for the value of all work, Lucas (2011) suggests that they were able to build positive identities about undertaking mining work, as well as justify constructing a longer-term career in this occupation.

The literature examined here highlights how the construction of a career identity by individuals may vary, even within the context of the same occupation. The stigmatised nature of low-skilled work means that some may struggle to construct a positive career identity. However, others may find ways of reframing their experiences by comparing their work more favourably than others within their trade, or as higher status work than other occupations. As a result of these processes, some low-skilled workers may construct a positive career identity seemingly against the odds.

2.4.3 Reconceptualising Career

The career theory and empirical work examined so far in this review provide valuable insights into the notion of career in the low-skilled sector. Collectively

this research illustrates that how low-skilled careers are conceptualised depends upon standpoint. From an objective perspective, low-skilled work appears to have little to offer as a short-term job, let alone a sustainable career. As a result, this sector continues to be perceived widely at a societal level as devoid of career opportunities. However, the small body of qualitative research that has investigated subjective perspectives indicates a far more complex and interesting situation. Whilst it confirms that some low-skilled workers certainly face considerable career challenges, there are also instances where others perceive meaningful career patterns, achieve a personal sense of career success or construct a positive career identity. Furthermore, research is beginning to reveal that a complex range of factors underpin variations in how low-skilled workers perceive their career experiences, just like their skilled counterparts.

In terms of limitations, the main shortcoming with empirical research to date is that there is simply not enough of it. As this review has highlighted, the situation reflects in part a historic understanding of career as an observable, hierarchical pathway (Dlouhy et al., 2020). However, as definitions of career have broadened there have been repeated calls for more research to address low-skilled career issues (Brown, 2016; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). These have become even more pressing as the labour market has polarised, resulting in contemporary growth in many parts of the low-skilled sector (Bakhshi et al., 2017). None of these developments have resulted in any substantive shift of research focus though, leaving the career experiences of those outside elite professions remaining poorly understood (Barnes et al., 2016). Additionally, the small body of salient empirical research that does exist is fragmented both theoretically and over time. This makes it difficult to draw comparisons about low-skilled career experiences that have been investigated variously as career patterns, success or identity. Some empirical studies also date back decades, which means that care needs to be taken in comparing older findings with more recent studies. Whilst existing research therefore provides important insights into the complexities of low-skilled career experiences, further research and consolidation is required.

Whilst the issues identified here highlight the timeliness of undertaking a study investigating the low-skilled sector from a career perspective, a key challenge for this thesis was to identify how it might best build on existing research. One option was to follow in the tracks of prior research and frame a study of low-skilled career experiences in terms of career patterns, success or identity. However, this thesis sought instead to develop a more integrated conceptual approach, with a view to overcoming some of the fragmentation that characterises existing research. In doing so, the overall aim was to respond to calls for more research into low-skilled careers. The particular concern was then to understand better any variation in how individuals perceive low-skilled work experiences from a career perspective. In line with the definition outlined earlier in the chapter, this involved taking the view that everyone constructs a career, even low-skilled workers. Furthermore, it meant investigating the subjective career, by focusing upon low-skilled workers' personal interpretations of their unfolding work experiences. The research design then needed to align with this ontological position, as well as provide a means of identifying and understanding different types of career experience.

The approach taken in this thesis draws upon two contemporary notions of career as both narrative and a boundary crossing phenomenon. Initially, career narrative and career boundary theory were considered as two alternative conceptual approaches. The notion of career narratives has become valued as a means of conceptualising the different ways in which individuals make sense of their complex, temporal work experiences (Cassell & Bishop, 2018). Placing career boundaries centre stage has also been identified as a key means of understanding how individuals navigate through social space (Inkson et al., 2012). However, after reviewing both the career narrative and career boundary literatures, the decision was taken to investigate how cab drivers' career narratives are shaped by career boundaries. Drawing these two conceptualisations together in this thesis offered an opportunity to explore the interplay between career narratives and career boundaries, rather than taking only a single perspective. Taking this approach offered a comprehensive means of not only investigating career boundary processes in a low-skilled setting, but also how they might shape different types of career narrative. The details of this particular conceptualisation of career are set out in the following chapter.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has identified that the low-skilled sector, in spite of being characterised typically as problematic work, offers some people opportunities to construct sustained and meaningful careers. However, whilst research has started to uncover how individuals may interpret this type of work positively in terms of career patterns, success and identity, it remains an under-researched area. As this sector continues to grow though, the imperative to understand low-skilled career experiences has increased and resulted in calls for further research. This study therefore seeks to provide a timely investigation into how individuals interpret their low skilled work experiences from a career perspective. Finally, this chapter identifies that in order to overcome the fragmentation of prior research approaches and address the complexities of low-skilled career experiences, the decision was taken to explore cab drivers' career narratives from a career boundary perspective.

CHAPTER 3 CAREER, NARRATIVES AND BOUNDARIES

3.1 Introduction

Having established a research gap in terms of understanding how individuals interpret low-skilled work as a career, this chapter now sets out how career is conceptualised in the context of the thesis. This clarification is necessary because, as the last chapter identified, conceptualisations of career abound. So, a key challenge for this study was to consider how best to conceptualise career in order to account for the diverse ways in which individuals may interpret their low-skilled careers. This chapter therefore sets out the rationale for investigating career narratives from a career boundary perspective as an effective means of examining complex low-skilled career experiences.

In the early stages of this thesis, consideration was given to conceptualising career from either a narrative or a boundary perspective. Interest in temporal career narratives has grown in recent decades, as a valuable means of understanding the nuanced ways in which individuals make sense of their unfolding work experiences over time (Bujold, 2004). Investigating the ways in which individuals construe multiple career boundaries has also been advocated as an 'integrated' approach to understanding how they construct careers across social space (Rodrigues et al., 2016, p. 673). However, the initial inspiration for drawing upon both concepts for the purpose of this thesis was prompted by Arnold's suggestion that boundaries may offer a map 'that helps people construct narratives of their career' (2011, p. 108). This raised the interesting possibility of interplay between career narrative and career boundary processes, which acted as a catalyst for developing the particular conceptual approach that underpins this study. That approach extends beyond Arnold's (2011) proposal, which focuses only on mapping issues. Instead, this thesis

argues that an individual's career narrative is shaped in different ways by the career boundaries that they encounter during the course of their working life.

Both the career narrative and career boundary literatures were reviewed at the outset of this study, in order to clarify key definitions and conceptualisations. Arising from this review, two particular conceptualisations were selected as key in the context of this thesis. From a narrative perspective, it has been proposed that individuals interpret their work experiences though the construction of a career narrative (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011; Savickas, 2005). From a boundary perspective, it has been argued that individuals navigate through a bounded social space during the course of their working life. This will involve crossing some boundaries, as well as remaining within and managing others (Inkson et al., 2012). These specific conceptualisations of career are then drawn together for the purpose of this thesis as follows. It is proposed that an individual's career narrative is shaped by career boundaries. More specifically, it is argued that individuals in the same occupation will perceive a common set of boundaries as salient in shaping their career. However, each person may perceive and experience those boundaries in different ways. Finally, it is argued that an individual's career boundary experiences will shape the type of career narrative that they construct.

The ideas which have been summarised here are discussed in further detail through the remainder of the chapter. This includes clarifying the particular way in which career narratives and career boundaries are defined and conceptualised in the context of this thesis. The chapter then moves on to explain how career narratives can be conceived of from a career boundary perspective, with a view to minimising problems with fragmentation that characterise the existing body of low-skilled career research. Finally, the research questions that underpin this study are identified and discussed.

3.2 Career Narratives

Ideas about narrative have attracted interest across a wide range of disciplines, including the career field. This has resulted in a growing body of research which is concerned with understanding the ways in which individuals make sense of, give meaning to, and construct their careers through narrative (Cohen & Duberley, 2013; Young & Popadiuk, 2012). Narrative theory has prompted new, innovative approaches both to research (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006) and career counselling practice (Kidd, 2006; Reid, 2015). Furthermore, it has resulted in a radical rethinking of the nature and meaning of career itself which has led to the proposal that 'career is a narrative' (Young & Popadiuk, 2012, p. 14). These ideas are explored here in order to explain why it is useful to conceptualise low-skilled work experiences as a career narrative. This includes defining key terms, as well as examining the notion of career as a narrative and its value in the context of this thesis.

3.2.1 Definitions

Any use of the term 'narrative' in research requires explanation, because definitions abound (Squire et al., 2014). Narrative theory itself has a long history and has been adopted by academic disciplines in many different ways (Bamberg, 2006). As a result, narrative has been used to describe 'a diversity of topics of study, methods of investigation and analysis, and theoretical orientations' (Squire, 2008, p. 5). Narratives may also be constructed through an array of different mediums, ranging from written accounts, spoken forms, visual and new media technology formats (Davis & Dwyer, 2017; Höykinpuro & Ropo, 2014). To add to the confusion, whilst the terms 'narrative' and 'story' are often used interchangeably in the literature, some researchers consider them to have distinct meanings (Squire et al., 2014). As the idea of narrative is so open to interpretation, this section clarifies the particular way in which it is applied in this thesis.

In its broadest sense, a narrative has been defined as 'any spoken or written presentation' (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 13). However, this definition has such a

wide application that it fails to differentiate the notion of a narrative in any meaningful way. More usefully in the context of this study, Elliott (2005, p. 3) has proposed that 'a narrative can be understood to organise a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to that whole.' A career narrative therefore organises unfolding work-related events into a unified sequence that is characterised by a beginning, middle and ending (Cochran, 1997). The presumption is that early experiences of working life, subsequent work transitions and future work aspirations are drawn together by the person concerned and integrated into a narrative account of their career (Savickas, 2005). Rather than being a singular process though, career narratives can be subject to ongoing reconfiguration in order to accommodate new, evolving and anticipated future work events (Cohen et al., 2004). So, whilst a career narrative is constructed by the individual at a particular point in time, it may be subject to revision as that person moves through their working life.

Career narratives are conceived of by researchers from two key positions: constructivist and social constructionist. In both cases, 'meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting' (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Unlike positivism which focuses on the nature of an independent 'objective, external reality,' constructivism and social constructionism are concerned with the idea that individuals each construct their own reality in relation to the world that they live in (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). However, constructivism and social constructionism differ in terms of how they conceive of individuals constructing that reality. Whilst constructivism proposes that the process is largely internal to the individual, social constructionism argues that it is rooted primarily in social practice (Young & Collin, 2004). This thesis takes a constructivist stance, focusing upon how individuals themselves attribute meaning to their work experiences through the construction of a personal career narrative (Bujold, 2004; Savickas, 2005). Taking this approach is distinct from social constructionism, which focuses instead upon how career narratives are constructed through social interactions with other people and by drawing upon shared societal narratives (Cohen et al., 2004; Young & Popadiuk, 2012). The ontological and epistemological

positioning of this study will be discussed again further in Chapter Five Research Methods.

In a final point of clarification, a distinction is sometimes made between a narrative and a story. Whilst these two terms are often used interchangeably (Squire et al., 2014), some researchers distinguish the two. For example, Cohen and Mallon (2001, p. 50) differentiate narratives as literary texts and novels, whilst applying the term story to personal accounts that individuals construct about their daily life. However, this study adopts an alternative distinction between stories and narratives based upon their scale. This approach aligns with researchers who distinguish 'small' stories that individuals exchange in everyday life, from 'big' stories that take the form of more extensive biographical narratives (Bamberg, 2006; Freeman, 2006; Phoenix & Sparkes, 2009). Polkinghorne (1988) has also distinguished between stories constructed by an individual about specific experiences, which are then subsumed into an overarching life story, or meta-narrative. The term career narrative is used similarly in this study to refer to the 'big' story or 'meta-narrative' that individuals construct about the totality of their work experiences, as opposed to the 'small' stories that they might tell about one particular job or career transition.

3.2.2 Career as Narrative

Within the career field, interest in narrative evolved in the latter decades of the twentieth century as recognition grew that career is a complex, temporal and socially situated phenomenon (Savickas, 2005). This resulted in critique of prevailing positivist approaches, because of concern that they offered overly simplistic and static insights into working lives (Cohen & Mallon, 2001). Career counselling practitioners had also identified limitations with trait and factor assessments that failed to capture the complexity of their clients' careers across the lifespan (McIlveen & Midgely, 2015). Some career researchers and practitioners were therefore interested in finding new ways to conceptualise career, as well as 'rich methodologies to explore it' (Peiperl & Gunz, 2007, p. 52). At the same time, the broader social sciences were experiencing a 'narrative turn' in which narrative theory was seen as a valuable means of

framing the complexities of people's lives (Atkinson, 1997). Interest was sparked in the career field too and narrative theory has gone on since to offer career research and career practice new ways forward in terms of modelling and investigating complex, temporal career issues (Reid, 2016).

Of particular interest in this thesis is the notion that career is a narrative (Young & Popadiuk, 2012). This idea is underpinned by the assumption that narrative is fundamental to the way in which people create meaning from their life experiences (Bruner, 2003; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). This is not a universally held view though. For example, Sartwell (2006) has argued that not everyone will process the entirety of their life experiences through narrative. However, this thesis concurs with others who have argued that narration is central to the human condition:

> We are all tellers of tales. We each seek to provide our scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging the episodes of our lives into stories (McAdams, 1993, p. 11).

This assessment is based upon evidence of an innate human capacity for constructing narratives. Examples range from the earliest tradition of oral histories to an abundance of modern-day books, plays and films (McAdams, 1993). Beyond narrative as entertainment though, research has uncovered an inherent tendency for individuals to construct accounts of their personal lives in narrative form, by selecting and ordering life events into a coherent narrative (Squire et al., 2013). In applying this idea to the career field, it has been argued that individuals make sense of their temporal work experiences through narrative (Savickas, 2005). In other words, 'careers are no more, or less than the stories we tell about them' (Inkson et al., 2015, p. 260). Creating a narrative about their working lives can therefore be understood as *the* means by which everyone, including low-skilled workers, constructs their career.

Conceptualising career as narrative is thus helpful in the context of this thesis, because it offers a means of understanding and classifying how low-skilled workers themselves account for their working lives. This is because career narratives provide insights into:

> The ways in which individuals make sense of their careers as they evolve through time and space, attending to both the holistic nature of career as well as to specific career transitions' (Cohen & Mallon, 2001 p. 48).

Career narratives can therefore help us move beyond investigating work experiences as standalone experiences, to focus instead on how they unfold in the context of both prior and future experiences. For example, investigating career narratives has helped to identify a complex array of factors driving occupation transitions associated with skilled work, as well as variation in the extent to which such moves were perceived to play out successfully over time (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014; Liu et al., 2012; Peake & McDowall, 2012). Exploring career narratives has also uncovered nuanced interpretations of unemployment in skilled settings as anything from a short-term setback, to a critical discontinuity in the career story (Blustein et al, 2013; Gabriel et al., 2010). Other studies of career narratives have provided insights into how unfolding work experiences within a single occupation or sector can be interpreted in different ways. For example, Herman (2015) categorised the career narratives of women working in the science, engineering and technology sector into three types: rebooting (lifelong career), rerouting (substantive career change) and retreating (prioritising family commitments). Whilst this type of empirical research has been undertaken largely within the skilled sector to date (LaPointe, 2013), the studies outlined here highlight how investigating career narratives offers a valuable means of understanding variations in positive/negative experiences of transitioning into and then working in a low-skilled occupation.

Having established value in conceptualising career as a narrative, this thesis goes on to argue that career narratives can be conceived of as shaped by career boundaries. The following section therefore moves on to examine the nature and role of career boundaries themselves. The final section will then focus upon how and why career narratives and career boundaries are drawn together for the purpose of this thesis.

3.3 Career Boundaries

Career boundary issues have attracted increasing attention from researchers in the 21st century. This has been sufficient to drive the development of a substantial new research agenda which is concerned with identifying the nature and role of boundaries in a career context (Guest & Rodrigues, 2014). This has included understanding better how career boundaries evolve, the form that they take and the ways in which they may shape careers (Inkson et al., 2012). Beyond this though, ideas about boundaries have led to a reconceptualisation of career as something that unfolds both within and across career boundaries (Inkson, 2006). These issues are examined here, with the aim of establishing why it may be helpful to investigate low-skilled career narratives from a career boundary perspective. This section therefore defines key terms, before going on to examine the notion of career as a boundary crossing process and its value for this thesis.

3.3.1 Definitions

In seeking to define career boundaries, a key issue is that 'there are many different kinds of boundary' (Inkson, 2006, p. 54). Furthermore, reference has been made not only to boundaries in the context of career, but also to 'borders' and 'barriers' (Guest & Rodrigues, 2014). For example, in studies of work/life balance Clarke (2000) refers to the work/life *border*, whilst Ashforth et al. (2000) employ the term *boundary* instead. However, in referring subsequently to both of these studies, Kanji and Cahusac (2015) opt to use the two terms interchangeably. Reference has also been made to career *barriers*, which have been defined as 'events or conditions, within the person or in his or her environment, that make career progress difficult' (Swanson & Woitke, 1997: 434). Career barriers in this context can refer to 'internal states' such as a lack of confidence and 'external states' such as gender or race discrimination (Ituma & Simpson, 2009, p. 732). So, not only is there a confusing array of boundary-related terms, but researchers do not always apply them in a consistent fashion.

In this thesis, the focus of interest is upon boundaries that differentiate career domains. A domain is a set of 'homogenous elements which are perceived to belong to a category' (Rodrigues et al., 2016, p. 672). In a career context, boundaries are understood as 'things that surround and separate other things,' thereby differentiating career domains one from another (Gunz et al., 2007, p. 474). These career boundaries commence as an idea in the minds of individuals but are shared subsequently across groups to become established as 'social facts' (Gunz et al., 2007, p. 475). Key stakeholders in this process can include career actors themselves, employers, professional bodies, educators and governments (King et al., 2005). For example, research has established that occupation boundaries evolve in stages, beginning with informal networking between like-minded individuals and culminating in formal recognition by external bodies (Abbott, 1998; 1995; Montgomery & Oliver, 2007). Other types of career boundaries have also become established over time through such social interactions. These include boundaries delimiting job, organisation, professional and industry domains (Gunz et al., 2000; Gunz et al., 2007) as well as 'hierarchical status, employment status, community, country, social class and work/home' (Inkson et al., 2012, p. 326). Low-skilled work and skilled work can also be understood as two bounded domains, differentiated by society as a means of making sense of a complex labour market. Career boundaries that evolve in this way therefore structure the social space through which everyone navigates, including low-skilled workers, as their life unfolds.

Career boundaries can also take different forms. For example, Hernes (2004, p. 10) has identified that 'organisations operate within multiple sets of co-existing boundaries.' He highlights that an organisation can be delimited by the perimeter of the physical building that it occupies. However, he suggests that it can also be understood as a social group that is bounded by behavioural norms and a group identity. Boundaries associated with a particular domain may therefore manifest themselves in different but co-existing ways. Career boundaries may also be crossed as people transition from one work role to another (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nicholson & West, 1988), or between work and non-work domains (Kreiner et al., 2009). In this context, the term 'barrier' is then applied in this thesis specifically to those boundaries that act to constrain actions, such as preventing individuals from transitioning from one career

domain to another. Finally, whilst the term border has sometimes been applied to the work/non-work boundary (Clarke, 2000) as well as geographic boundaries (Gunz et al., 2007), these are both referred to as boundaries in this thesis for consistency.

3.3.2 Career as Boundary Crossing

The significance of boundaries in shaping careers has become the subject of extensive contemporary debate. On the one hand, boundaryless career theory has drawn valuable attention to careers that transcend organisation boundaries (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). In doing so, this theory has shifted conceptualisations of career beyond traditional notions of climbing an organisational career ladder (Currie et al., 2006) and has gone on to inspire the investigation of a far wider array of career patterns (Baruch et al., 2015). On the other hand, critics have identified shortcomings with this concept. These include concerns that the 'boundaryless' label has resulted in a downplaying of the role of boundaries in shaping careers. For example, research has found evidence that some workers remain bounded within a single domain such as an organisation, occupation or industry (Clarke, 2013; Gubler et al., 2014; Gunz et al., 2000) for the duration of their career. Additionally, any assumption that everyone can move freely across career boundaries has been challenged. This is because of evidence that boundary crossing can be restricted to agentic and privileged career actors, who possess the requisite career capital to cross boundaries at will (Ituma & Simpson, 2009; King et al., 2005; Pringle & Mallon, 2003). At the same time, others might lack the necessary skills, social networks or financial resources to negotiate across boundaries, thereby restricting career mobility and choice (Van Laer et al, 2019).

Critics of boundaryless career theory have then proposed a rethinking of the nature and role of career boundaries. Of particular interest in the context of this thesis is the proposal that 'boundaries are essential, and not marginal, to careers' (Rodrigues & Guest, 2010, p. 1170). Bringing boundaries to the fore in this way has resulted in novel research. As well as seeking to understand how career boundaries evolve (Oliver & Montgomery, 2005), this includes

investigating the varied forms that boundaries take and their role in shaping different types of career (Gunz et al., 2007; Inkson et al., 2012). New theorising has proposed that career boundaries can impact upon career patterns, as well as the achievement of career success (Rodrigues et al, 2012). Interest has also focused on the way in which boundaries define career domains and can thereby impact upon career identity (Kanji & Cahusac, 2015; Knapp et al., 2013). Most significantly, it has resulted in a reconceptualisation of careers as phenomena that 'are conducted within, and across, many different kinds of boundary' (Inkson, 2006, p. 55). Boundaries therefore have a part to play in many different facets of working life and as such have become worthy of study as phenomena that are central to the shaping of career.

Placing boundaries centre stage has then opened up different ways of thinking about and investigating contemporary careers. Far from dismissing traditional notions of organisational careers, they can be understood instead as one particular form of bounded career (Gunz et al., 2000). Similarly, careers may exhibit different degrees of boundarylessness, depending upon the extent to which individuals perceive being able to cross career boundaries at will (King et al., 2005). By adopting a 'boundary-focused' perspective, the research interest shifts to understanding the nature of career boundaries themselves, the circumstances under which they may or may not be crossed and their role in shaping how careers unfold over time (Inkson et al., 2012, p. 323). It has then been argued that investigating the multiple boundary processes that shape occupational careers offers a more comprehensive means of understanding the varied ways in which contemporary working lives may unfold (Rodrigues et al., 2016). Whilst such research has been undertaken largely in the skilled sector (Guest & Rodrigues, 2014), this thesis extends these ideas to the low-skilled sector as a means of gaining better insights into how boundaries shape the construction of careers in such a setting.

3.4 An Integrated Approach

Having clarified how career narratives and career boundaries are conceptualised for the purpose of this thesis, as well as their value for investigating any variation in low-skilled work career experiences, this chapter now moves on to explain how they are brought together in the context of this thesis. First, the rationale for proposing that career narratives are shaped by career boundaries is set out. Then three key facets of this conceptualisation are examined in more detail: salient career boundaries; the varied ways in which they might be perceived; and the types of career narrative that boundary experiences could shape. Additionally, the research questions that evolve from this conceptualisation with regard to low-skilled career experiences are identified.

3.4.1 Career Narratives shaped by Career Boundaries

Earlier in this chapter, the construction of a career narrative was proposed as the central means by which individuals account for their unfolding work experiences. However, this thesis argues that those 'work' experiences can be reconceptualised as 'career boundary' experiences. Taking this approach brings career boundaries centre stage in the context of a career narrative. It means that a career narrative can be expected to account for crossing or remaining within career boundaries that individuals encounter during the course of their working life. Moreover, it opens up the possibility that career boundaries may shape a career narrative.

This thesis proposes that career boundaries shape a career narrative through the process of narrative emplotment. Constructing a career narrative requires an individual to draw together and connect key work experiences through narrative emplotment (Savickas, 2012). Emplotment itself involves weaving key experiences together to construct a meaningful whole (Polkinghorne, 1988). This is achieved by selecting, ordering and evaluating those experiences in such a way that they form part of a coherent plotline trajectory which culminates in a logical outcome (Gergen & Gergen, 1984). For the purpose of the thesis,

this process of emplotment is reconceptualised from a career boundary perspective as follows. Individuals can be expected to cross an occupation boundary when they transition into low-skilled work and encounter further career boundaries as their low-skilled employment unfolds subsequently. In order to construct a career narrative, a low-skilled worker will select, order and evaluate their career boundary experiences to form a coherent plotline. The type of career narrative plotline that the individual constructs will then be shaped by issues such as the nature of the career boundaries that they encounter, as well as how those boundaries are perceived and can be managed.

Conceptualising career narratives from a career boundary perspective then raises interesting questions in the context of this thesis. The overarching question is how the career narratives that cab drivers construct might be shaped by career boundaries. On the one hand, the literature in Chapter 2 suggests that prevailing views about low-skilled work as problematic mean that cab drivers might be expected to construct career narratives that reflect career challenges and therefore have negative outcomes. On the other hand, those studies which have identified how low-skilled workers may identify meaningful career patterns, perceive subjective career success or construct a positive work identity indicate potential for some cab drivers to construct career narratives with positive outcomes. The focus of interest in this thesis is then upon how career boundary processes underpin the construction of cab driving career narratives and the different forms of career narrative plotline that those processes might shape.

In seeking to understand how cab driving career narratives may be shaped by career boundaries, this thesis addresses three specific issues. The first concerns which types of career boundaries a cab driver might select as salient in shaping their career narrative, given that they might encounter many boundaries as they transition into and work in this occupation. The second and related issue is why these career boundaries are perceived as salient. The third issue concerns what type of career narrative cab drivers may construct about their career boundary experiences. The research questions that underpin this thesis can therefore be summarised as follows:

How are cab drivers' career narratives shaped by career boundaries?

1. Which career boundaries do cab drivers identify as salient in their career narratives?
2. Why do cab drivers perceive these career boundaries as salient?
3. What type of career narrative do cab drivers construct about their career boundary experiences?

Each of the three different facets of the overarching research question are now considered here in turn. This includes examining key theory and empirical work with a view to setting out in more detail what is already known about each of these issues, particularly from a low-skilled career perspective. A more detailed exploration of career narrative and career boundary issues in the context of cab driving itself will then follow in Chapter 4 which examines the research context.

3.4.2 Salient Career Boundaries

This thesis conceptualises the social space through which people navigate during the course of their working life as a 'bounded terrain' (Gunz et al., 2007, p. 474). Undertaking a career then involves both working within bounded career domains and crossing career boundaries (Inkson, 2006; Rodrigues et al., 2016). In constructing a career narrative, it is proposed that individuals will seek to construct a coherent account of their career boundary experiences as they unfold. However, rather than accounting for every career boundary that they engage with, it is argued that individuals draw upon a subset of key boundaries. This idea is supported by empirical research. For example, a study of pharmacists found that the occupation, organisation, public/private sector, geographic and work/home boundaries were perceived as key in shaping their careers (Rodrigues et al., 2016). Similarly, managers working in the Canadian biotechnology industry highlighted the particular significance of organisation, occupation, geographic and industry boundaries in shaping their careers (Gunz et al., 2000). A study of US managers also identified that the way in which their careers were constructed depended on a combination of the functional, organisation, geographic area and work/home boundaries that they encountered (Chen et al., 2011). Empirical work in the skilled sector therefore

supports the idea that individuals working in the same occupation will select a core set of career boundaries as salient in shaping their careers.

Very little research has been undertaken about career boundaries within the low-skilled sector though. Instead, the focus has been principally on understanding how career boundaries act as barriers which prevent some people accessing work in the skilled sector. As a result, there is longstanding recognition that some individuals face considerable challenges accessing higher status work including women, ethnic minority groups and the disabled (Lent et al., 2000; McKinney & Swartz, 2019; Pringle & Mallon, 2003). A complex array of reasons for this has been identified, ranging from a lack of career capital, to a need for flexible employment, risk aversion and prejudicial employer attitudes (Van Laer et al., 2019). Additionally, there has been concern that once somebody takes-up low-skilled employment, they can remain trapped on a long-term basis in this sector (D'Arcy & Finch, 2017). In terms of career boundaries within the low-skilled sector itself, prevailing views suggest that career boundaries have a negligible impact on the construction of career. For example, it has been proposed that low-skilled careers may effectively be boundaryless, because there are few costs incurred in crossing boundaries characterised by low entry requirements (Guest & Rodrigues, 2014). In the absence of empirical research, the low-skilled sector has therefore been conceived of effectively as a formless, unbounded social landscape.

However, it is possible that low-skilled workers will perceive a core set of career boundaries as salient in shaping their career narrative in similar ways to their skilled counterparts. For example, career boundaries associated with low-skilled work are likely to be characterised by different properties including permeability, durability and flexibility (Inkson et al., 2012; Rodrigues et al., 2016).

Permeability describes the ease with which a boundary may be crossed and can impact on career mobility (Gunz et al., 2002). Within the low-skilled sector, the assumption has been that minimal entry requirements mean that the occupation boundary can be crossed readily (Guest & Rodrigues, 2014). However, Gunz et al. (2007) suggest that all career actors have to be aware of the potential to cross a boundary, decide if it is an attractive proposition and

assess the likelihood of achieving a successful boundary crossing into a new role. So, crossing the boundary into a low-skilled occupation requires knowledge about a work role vacancy, having the requisite skills and/or work experience, undertaking a successful interview and then navigating across the occupation boundary into a specific job and organisation. As with the skilled sector, career transitions into and within the low-skilled sector may therefore take time to unfold and be subject to approval by employer gatekeepers (King et al., 2005). So, even career boundaries associated with low-skilled work may not be perceived by everyone as readily crossed and entirely permeable.

Durability is another property of career boundaries. Some boundaries are agreed on a long-term basis across local, national and even international social contexts (Zerubavel, 1993). However, others are subject to frequent dispute and become the focus of power struggles, ranging from localised debate to international war (Sturdy et al., 2009). This means that even well-established boundaries cannot be assumed to be fixed permanently, or respected universally, and may be subject to renegotiation or even overturned (Hernes, 2004). It has therefore been suggested that all boundaries are best understood as 'complex, shifting… entities' that may evolve, change and ultimately disappear again over the course of time (Heracleous, 2004, p. 95). Durability issues have implications for career boundaries in not only skilled but also low-skilled settings. Longstanding job and occupation boundaries may offer a safe haven, but others may disappear as a result of economic or technological changes (Heracleous, 2004). New organisation boundaries may also evolve as companies start-up, but disappear if they fail (Hernes, 2003). Whilst new career boundaries might demarcate career opportunities, the failure of a career boundary may also prompt involuntary transitions as a result of redundancy. Even within a low-skilled occupation, these boundary durability issues are likely to present both career challenges and opportunities.

Flexibility is also a property of career boundaries. A substantive body of job crafting literature is concerned with 'the process of employees proactively changing the boundaries that comprise their jobs' (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013, p. 283). This can involve shaping the task and/or relational boundaries of the work role that an individual is charged with undertaking (Wrzesniewski & Dutton,

2001). Job crafting can therefore offer opportunities for individuals in both high and low-skilled work settings to manage their designated job role boundary in such a way that they derive greater meaning and satisfaction in undertaking their day-to-day work (Berg et al., 2010; Nielson & Abildgaard, 2012). Additionally, there is an extensive body of work concerned with the flexibility of the work/non-work boundary. This includes investigating the extent to which working hours can be adapted around family commitments (Kreiner et al., 2009), as well as the potential for new technology to enable employees to work from home (Derks et al., 2015). Specifically, within the low-skilled sector, concern has been expressed about the long hours some people work in order to earn a living wage (Whittaker & Hurrell, 2013). At the same time, research has identified that some individuals value the extensive availability of flexible work contracts, in spite of relatively poor pay rates (CIPD, 2015). It is therefore possible that the extent to which a boundary may be perceived as flexible in the low-skilled sector may vary.

The literature outlined here suggests that, far from being absent or irrelevant, career boundaries associated with low-skilled work may be just as important and complex as those in the skilled sector. A key research question for this thesis is therefore concerned with which career boundaries cab drivers perceive as salient in the context of their career narrative. This question focuses upon the different types of career boundaries that might be regarded by individual cab drivers as important in shaping their career. Additionally, it is concerned with understanding any key career boundary properties that contribute to perceptions of salience such as permeability, durability and flexibility.

3.4.3 Perceptions of Career Boundaries

In addition to understanding the types of salient career boundary, a related issue of interest is why cab drivers perceive them as salient in the context of their career narrative. Of particular relevance here is literature which proposes that individuals may perceive boundaries as constraining or enabling the construction of careers (Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2018; Inkson et al., 2012). Whilst much of the research focus has been upon the ways in which boundaries

constrain career, there has also been a renewed interest in their enabling capacity (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2014). This arises from the notion that 'boundaries are conditions not only for separation and exclusion, but also for communication, exchange, bridging, and inclusion' (Lamont & Molnar, 2002, p. 181). Career boundaries therefore have the potential to be perceived as 'functional and positive, rather than as something to be wished away' (Pringle & Mallon, 2003, p. 848). All workers, including those in low-skilled settings, can therefore be expected to each have their own personal views about the career boundaries that they encounter, as well as their relative significance in the context of their career narrative.

Much contemporary research has focused upon how career boundaries associated with the skilled sector play a constraining role, by acting as impermeable barriers and thereby constraining career mobility and choice (Grote & Hall., 2013). However, as the previous section identified, it is possible that even in the low-skilled sector an occupation, job or organisation boundary may be perceived as restricting movement between work roles. Furthermore, even if individuals succeed in negotiating across a career boundary, it has been argued that the boundary may act as a filtering device. For example, longstanding work by Schein (1971, p. 406) has proposed that intra-organisational boundaries such as those between departments are governed by a 'set of rules' that dictate who can cross them, when and for what particular purposes. Building on this work, Gunz et al. (2007) have argued that boundaries such as those associated with occupations act as filters which prevent some people accessing particular work roles. It is therefore possible that the occupation boundary associated with a low-skilled occupation, such as cab driving, may be perceived by some to provide access only to a subset of potential work roles. Beyond permeability issues, the disappearance of a boundary arising from the closure of a company might result in redundancy and an enforced career transition into another work role. Some low-skilled workers may also struggle to manage the work/non-work boundary or craft a job boundary to their personal satisfaction. It is therefore possible that some career boundaries may be construed by low-skilled workers as problematic constraints during the course of their career.

In contrast, there is also potential for career boundaries to be perceived by low-skilled workers as enabling the construction of their career. There has been longstanding recognition that career boundaries can signpost a routeway into a domain such as a new job, organisation or occupation (Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2018). For example, an individual crossing an organisation boundary can be directed through an ordered range of social learning opportunities, from attending a formal induction program to the cuing of initial encounters with a supervisor, team members and peers (Van Maanen, 1978). Some types of career boundary crossing may also become normalised as 'status passages' such as moving from education to work, or from work into retirement (Glaser & Strauss, 1971, p. 1). Additionally, career boundaries may offer a 'map of the terrain' that helps individuals to navigate career pathways (Gubler et al., 2014, p. 642). In this capacity, career boundaries can act as reference points across space that enable individuals to plan and account for how their working life unfolds. For example, hierarchical career pathways in both high and low-skilled settings can be conceived of as crossing career boundaries from low status to high status work roles (Dafou, 2018). However, beyond this a whole variety of different boundary crossing routes and associated career pathways can be envisaged (Kovalenko & Mortelmans, 2014). Career boundaries may therefore be perceived of as usefully signposting and facilitating careers, rather than acting as constraints upon them.

The career literature also suggests that whether individuals perceive career boundaries as constraining or enabling their career can depend upon a variety of factors. Vocational preferences have been identified as one potential determinant. For example, Rodrigues et al. (2012) propose that an individual might construe a career boundary negatively if it prevents them taking up a preferred work role, but positively if it signposts an accessible path to that role. Whilst limited social networks can mean that an individual struggles to find out how to access a work role, having an extensive variety of colleagues, friends and family may help to identify vacancies and how to access them (Higgins, 2001). Life-stage may also influence perceptions of work/non-work boundary, as those with family responsibilities potentially seek out more flexible work options (Kreiner, 2009). Some social groups may also face multiple challenges in negotiating career boundaries. For example, there is evidence that recent

migrants not only lack social networks but also face racial discrimination (Ituma & Simpson, 2009). The unemployed, disabled, and women may also lack both social and economic resources to assist them in crossing preferred boundaries (Lent et al., 2000; Van Laer et al, 2019). A wide range of different factors may therefore underpin perceptions of boundaries as constraining or enabling the construction of careers among low-skilled workers.

Based upon this literature, it is possible to see how low-skilled workers may construe career boundaries as salient in different ways. The associated research question in the context of this thesis is therefore concerned with understanding why cab drivers might perceive the key boundaries that they encounter as anything from problematic constraints, to phenomena that enable the construction of their career.

3.4.4 Types of Career Narratives

A third issue of interest in this thesis is what type of career narrative cab drivers might construct about their career boundary experiences. Types of narratives have been classified in the literature in different ways, based upon the form of emplotment that characterises them. The emplotment process itself is concerned with the overall direction and shape of a narrative and is composed of two inter-related processes: chronological ordering of experiences and the evaluation of those experiences (Gergen & Gergen, 1984). In the context of this study these processes can be conceptualised as follows. First, the narrator orders salient career boundary experiences chronologically. Second, they evaluate how these career boundary experiences contribute to the plotline form. For example, a predominance of problematic career boundary experiences over time might be expected to shape a career narrative that is characterised by a regressive plotline with a negative outcome (Figure 3.1a). However, perceptions of predominantly enabling boundary experiences might shape a progressive plotline with a positive outcome (Figure 3.1b). It is also possible that some career boundary experiences may leave the plotline unchanged, resulting in it remaining stable at a relevant point on the evaluative axis (Figure 3.1c). Variations in personal boundary experiences can then be expected to shape

different forms of career narrative plotline that can be classified into particular types (Gergen & Gergen, 1984).

In terms of narrative chronology, salient career boundary experiences may shape the narrative by punctuating the plotline at different points (Inkson et al., 2012). For example, individuals might cross a career boundary into a low-skilled occupation at different stages during their working life. This event might arise shortly after leaving school (Nathan & Hill, 2006), at mid-career (Blau, 2007; Peake & McDowell, 2012) or later in the career in the run-up to retirement (Beehr & Bennett, 2014). Whilst working in a low-skilled occupation, individuals may also cross a variety of job and organisation boundaries that will further punctuate the narrative plotline at different chronological points. However, individuals may also remain within an occupation, job or organisation boundary for different lengths of time. So, whilst crossing a career boundary may be perceived by some as a short-lived transition, others may regard themselves as embedded within a particular boundary for a considerable time period (Ng et al., 2007). The process of crafting a job boundary may also occur at a particular point in time (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013) and managing the work/home boundary satisfactorily may take different forms at various life stages (Sturges, 2012). The chronological ordering of career boundary events may therefore contribute to the shaping of a career narrative plotline.

The way in which individuals evaluate career boundary experiences in the context of their career narrative can also be expected to impact upon plotline form. If a key career boundary has been perceived as a substantive constraint, it may be evaluated as a regressive turning point in the career narrative (Gergen & Gergen, 1984). For example, feeling unable to cross a preferred career boundary, having to make an enforced career boundary crossing, or traversing a career boundary into what is perceived as a lower status job might all be events that are evaluated as regressive turning points in the career narrative. Similarly, having to work long hours, or feeling unable to craft a job boundary to their personal satisfaction might also contribute to shaping regressive turning points. However, navigating across a career boundary into a preferred work role, or into what is perceived as a higher status role could be evaluated by the individual as a progressive turning point (Gergen & Gergen,

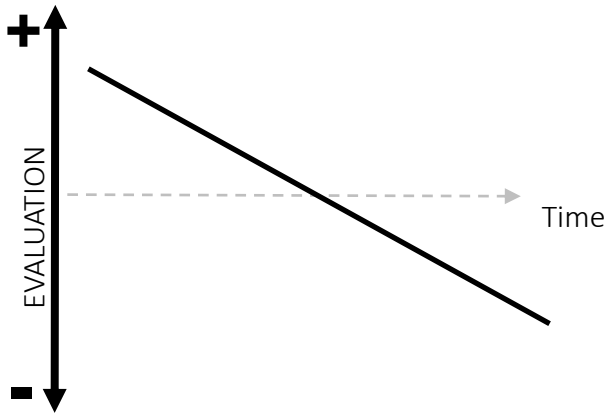
1984). Other positive experiences, such as utilising flexible working hours to accommodate other life commitments or crafting a personalised job boundary satisfactorily, might also contribute to shaping progressive turning points in the career narrative. Collectively, the evaluation of key boundary experiences as a career narrative unfolds will result in an unfolding series of regressive/progressive turning points that will contribute to the overall shaping of the career narrative plotline.

Identifying characteristic forms of career narrative plotline is then useful in the context of this thesis, because it provides a basis for classifying different types of low-skilled career experiences. Approaches taken by other researchers have included classifying career narratives based upon classical narrative plotline types such as heroic, romantic, comedic and tragic (Cassell & Bishop, 2018). However, career narratives may also be classified according to their own unique plotline forms. In a study of occupational embeddedness, I found that teachers constructed regressive, cyclical or progressive career narratives that reflected the varied ways that they felt about remaining in this demanding occupation (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2011). Other studies have also identified characteristic plotlines of gendered career/life stories (Lieblich et al., 1998), as well as parental influence on career development (Young et a., 1994). In all of these studies, the approach taken included summarising narrative plotlines as stylised graphics. This is the approach taken in this study and the process is set out in more detail in Chapter 5 which addresses research methods.

The literature outlined here illustrates how cab drivers' varied career boundary experiences may shape the construction of different types of personal career narrative. The final research question is therefore concerned with identifying the particular form of career narrative plotline that each cab driver constructs, with a view to classifying any key types.

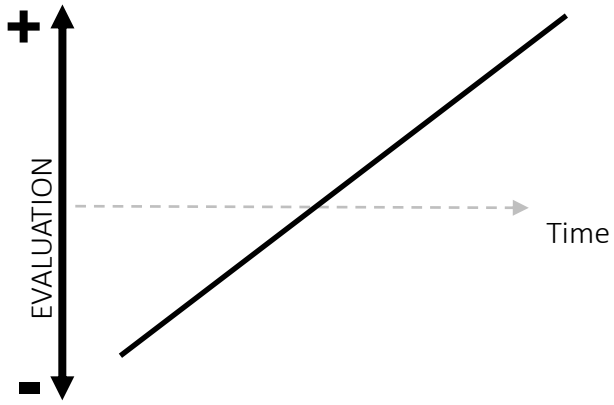
Figure 3.1 Plotline Form (Gergen & Gergen, 1984)

3.1a. Regressive Plotline

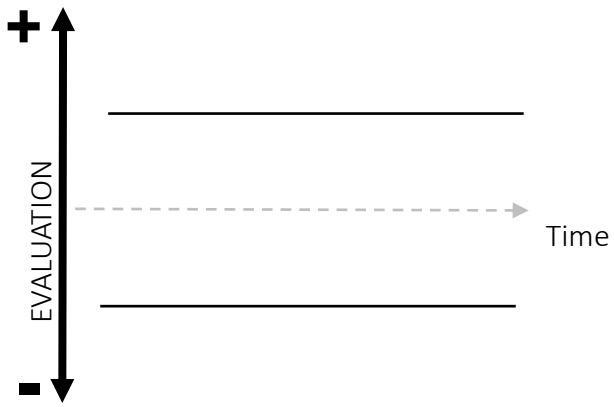


3.1b. Progressive Plotline

.



3.1c. Stable Plotline



3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has set out how career is conceived of for the purpose of this thesis. It identifies how contemporary notions of career narratives and career boundaries are drawn together. Key definitions and the particular way in which career narratives and career boundaries are conceptualised have also been identified. The chapter has set out the overarching research question which is concerned with how the career narratives that cab drivers construct are shaped by career boundaries. Three key elements of this conceptualisation have also been discussed and their associated research question identified. Unlike more fragmented research to date, the thesis proposes that this conceptual approach provides a more comprehensive lens through which to investigate any variation in how cab drivers construct a career in a low-skilled occupation.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH CONTEXT

4.1 Introduction

This study is located within the context of the English cab driving industry. Worldwide, the industry has a long history and has seen steady expansion during the 21st century (IBISWorld, 2019). During this time, cab driving has undergone many changes ranging from legislative revisions (Law Commission, 2014) to the introduction of new software technology that is transforming business models (Stewart, 2017). As a result, this occupation has attracted attention in the academic literature (e.g. Cassell & Bishop, 2014), as well being the subject of labour market reports (e.g. Department for Transport, 2018) and topical debate in the national press (e.g. Heathman, 2020). Information is also available from the trade press (e.g. Private Hire and Taxi Monthly, 2016), licensing regulators (Department for Transport, 2019) and employer websites (Addison Lee, 2020; Uber, 2020), as well as the career guidance sector (National Careers Service, 2020). Additionally, there are a number of online driver forums (e.g. Taxi Driver Online, 2020), personal blogs (e.g. CabbieBlog, 2020) and autobiographies (e.g. Findlay, 2010). A considerable variety of both academic and grey literature therefore provides insights into the wider industry, as well as the nature of cab driving itself.

This chapter examines what can be discerned from this literature and any associated career narrative and career boundary issues. It begins by providing a short overview of the cab driving industry, before examining how and why cab driving has been characterised across the literature typically as low-skilled, precarious and dirty work. It then identifies and examines cab driving work specifically from career narrative and career boundary perspectives. In doing so, this review provides context for the subsequent chapters of the thesis, which

go on to examine how cab drivers themselves construct career narratives and how these are shaped by the career boundaries that they encounter.

4.2 Overview of the Cab Driving Industry

The cab driving industry provides a tailored transport service for hire by an individual, or a small group of people (Department for Transport, 2020). This service involves not only the hiring of a vehicle, but also someone to drive it and convey the passenger to an agreed destination (People 1st, 2016). The industry operates worldwide (IBISWorld, 2019) and has a long history that can be traced back over centuries. For example, licensed watermen could be hired in London as early as the 12th century to ferry passengers by boat along the River Thames, whilst by the 17th century horse drawn carriages driven by coachmen were available for hire (Townsend, 2009). Since the turn of the 20th century though, the service has taken the form of hiring a motorised vehicle and dedicated driver (Georgano & Munro, 2011).

The nature of the present-day industry has been shaped in part by the development of state licensing arrangements, which regulate particular aspects of the service. Many different industries require licensing in the UK, from childminding to the hotel trade and transport sector, covering issues such as trading hours, health and safety, as well as training standards (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2020). In the cab driving industry, licensing regulations can vary from country to country around the world, but also within a national state (Law Commission, 2014). In England, a combination of national and local government regulations determines issues such as the nature of the hiring agreement with customers, the type of vehicles that can be used and the extent to which cab drivers' skills are assessed (Butcher, 2016). Collectively these regulations mean that the companies which provide cab services, individual drivers and vehicles each require separate forms of license in order to operate legally (Department for Transport, 2019). Responsibility for deciding the precise details of these licensing arrangements, as well as the issuing of licenses and the setting of fare tariffs, is currently devolved to

individual local authorities across England (Local Government Association, 2015).

A two-tier framework of national licensing regulates how the industry operates in England (Law Commission, 2014). A private hire vehicle (PHV) service - often referred to as a minicab service - has to be pre-booked for an agreed fee via a licensed cab firm. A taxi service is also available for pre-booking, but can additionally be hailed directly from the street, or hired at a designated taxi rank. Taxis are fitted with a meter that monitors the distance travelled and calculates the fare based on rates set by the local authority. Taxi services are also subject to more stringent licensing arrangements than minicabs, involving tighter specifications for driver testing, as well as the type of car that can be used and vehicle livery (Butcher, 2016). In order to be licensed as a taxi driver, applicants must pass a driving skills test, as well as a navigation test (Local Government Association, 2015). Outside London, the latter is a relatively straightforward process that involves checking an individual's knowledge of local landmarks and key roads. However, in London it takes the form of an intensive testing process known as 'The Knowledge' which can take several years to complete in order to become a black cab driver (Transport for London, 2020). There are also two tiers of black cab licence: a Yellow Badge which is a knowledge assessment to work primarily in the London suburbs, or a Green Badge which covers the entirety of London (Transport for London, 2020). In England it is therefore possible to be licensed as a minicab, taxi or (in London only) black cab driver.

Taxi and minicab services are widely available across England, but a third of cab drivers and cab vehicles are licensed in the London area where industry activity is highest (Department for Transport, 2018). However, cab services are available in all other major cities and also form an important component of rural passenger transport systems (Commission for Integrated Transport, 2008). Sector reports identify that the greatest demand for cab services is from the 18-29 year age group, lower income groups and those with some form of disability (IBISWorld, 2019). Demand for services fluctuates, peaking during evenings and weekends, as well as during the Christmas and New Year festivities (People 1st, 2016). In terms of workforce, over 360, 000 cab drivers are licensed

to work across England (Department for Transport, 2018). Of this total, almost two-thirds hold PHV licenses and the remainder hold taxi licenses. The workforce has traditionally been highly gendered, with over 90% of drivers being male, whilst a third of all drivers are from a Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic background (People 1st, 2016). Overall, the number of cab drivers in England has grown steadily throughout the 21st century and is forecast to continue to do so over the next decade (IBISWorld, 2019).

However, the precise nature of the industry's future has been the subject of much topical debate. A major two-year review of licensing arrangements was completed several years ago in England and Wales (Law Commission, 2012; 2014). This resulted in a draft Bill recommending the updating, simplifying and standardisation of licensing regulations and the process remains ongoing (Butcher, 2016; Local Government Association, 2019). This arose because of the rapid impact in recent years of new technology that is transforming hire arrangements in the industry (Department for Transport, 2019). In particular, new business models are evolving based on software apps that provide a platform for directly connecting cab drivers and passengers (Harding et al., 2016; He & Shen, 2015). This has led to the rapid growth in recent years of services such as Lyft and Uber, which are challenging existing legislative arrangements and traditional modes of service delivery, both in England and worldwide (Department for Transport, 2019; London Assembly Transport Committee, 2014). The government is therefore continuing to review statutory guidance in order to take account of the impact of technological changes on the cab driving industry (Department for Transport, 2019).

4.3 The Nature of Cab Driving Work

Whilst the cab driving industry has evolved and changed for over a century, the central task of cab driving work itself remains largely unchanged in the sense that cab drivers 'pick up passengers and take them to their destination by the quickest and safest route' (National Careers Service, 2020). This section examines how some of the key features of this work have been characterised in the literature. In particular, it looks at what has led this role to become

designated typically as low-skilled, precarious and dirty work, both within the academic literature as well as in wider society. This includes identifying and examining some of the key tasks involved in cab driving work, as well as associated pay, contractual and status issues.

4.3.1 Low-Skilled Work

The skills involved to undertake work as a cab driver are those required to convey a passenger safely in a vehicle to a desired destination (People 1st, 2016). Much of the focus in terms of gaining a cab driving license is upon assessing driving and navigation skills (Department for Transport, 2019). However, whilst it is possible to be licensed as a minicab, taxi or black cab driver, these three roles are usually classified collectively as low-skilled work for two main reasons. First, only a general education is required to become a cab driver in England (National Careers Service, 2020). Second, whilst it is necessary to have held a full UK or European driving license for at least one year (Law Commission, 2014), nearly three-quarters of adults over the age of 17 in England satisfy this condition (Office for National Statistics, 2019). As a result of these qualification thresholds, cab driving has been categorised by the UK's widely recognised Standard Occupational Classification (SOC, 2020) as a low-skilled occupation (see Chapter 2 for further details about this classification system).

Certainly, a survey of the cab drivers in England has highlighted that education levels are generally low (People 1st, 2016). That survey identified that 70% of drivers were qualified at Research Qualification Framework (RQF) Level 2 representing a basic education, whilst 20% of drivers held no formal qualifications. This has led to attempts within the industry to encourage cab drivers to complete a specialist RQF Level 2 certificate designed to improve driving safety, customer service and disability awareness skills (Transport Training Technology, 2018). Encouraging take-up of this accreditation has proved challenging though, as self-employed drivers are often reluctant to take unpaid time out from work to undertake the necessary training (People 1st, 2016). Others who transition into this occupation are overqualified though, with

10% of drivers holding further education qualifications including university degrees (People 1st, 2016). Some of this highly qualified group have taken up cab driving after working in skilled occupations such as the construction trades, police and armed services (Elaluf-Calderwood, 2010). Others have travelled to England as skilled migrants, but taken up cab driving because their prior qualifications have not proved transferable to comparable occupations (Migrant Advisory Committee, 2018). So, whilst cab driving has been designated a low-skilled occupation (SOC, 2020) in practice some of those undertaking this work are well-educated and have transitioned from skilled occupation backgrounds.

Beyond its classification as a low-skilled occupation, cab driving has also been characterised as routine work (Copsey & Taylor, 2010). Repeatedly picking up customers and conveying them to their destination has resulted in it being classified as repetitive and monotonous work, offering little scope for variety (Facey, 2010). It has also been suggested that those working for a cab firm are subject to a high level of managerial control, as their work is distributed via a central office call handling service, or a software app (Harding et al., 2016). As a result, it has been argued that cab drivers themselves have little control over the choice of their day-to-day work tasks or scheduling (He & Shen, 2015). Furthermore, a number of studies have highlighted the considerable risks that cab drivers face in dealing with some of the customers that they engage with, ranging from verbal abuse to serious physical assault (Choi, 2018; Cospey & Taylor, 2010; Machin & De Souza, 2004; Schwer et al., 2010). Cab driving has therefore often been characterised as work that involves routine tasks, with little opportunity for individuals to control the nature of their daily schedule.

In terms of pay, cab drivers working a forty-hour week can in theory earn an average income of between £14 000 - £30 000 per annum (National Careers Service, 2020). However, in practice an individual's earnings are dependent upon a wide range of factors including the type of cab license, local fare rates, number of journeys and hours worked, as well as fluctuations in key expenses such as fuel costs (National Private Hire Association, 2020). Anecdotal evidence from online forums and the trade press (Private Hire and Taxi Monthly, 2016; Taxi Driver Online, 2020), as well as surveys undertaken by unions (General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Union, 2020), also highlight

the potential for earnings to vary substantially and in some instances fail to meet minimum wage levels (Private Hire and Taxi Monthly, 2016; Taxi Driver Online, 2020). Overall, national reviews of pay and earnings have classified cab driving work as low-paid employment, based on the relatively high proportion of drivers earning at or below the national minimum wage (Low Pay Commission, 2016).

Finally, much of the literature presents cab driving as an occupation offering few opportunities for substantive career development. Only the occupation's skill sector council has identified any potential cab driving career progression route (People 1st, 2016). This has been framed in traditional terms of climbing an organisation ladder from working initially as a cab driver, to progression into managerial roles either as a 'Fleet Manager' or an 'Operations Manager.' However, as three-quarters of companies in this sector are small firms with fewer than five employees (People 1st, 2016; Transport for London, 2020), there are few organisations that can offer opportunities for this type of corporate career progression. The picture that is presented in the literature is therefore of a flat career hierarchy, with few developmental opportunities available beyond the cab driving role itself.

4.3.2 Precarious work

In terms of contractual arrangements, three-quarters of minicab and taxi drivers are self-employed (Department for Transport, 2019). Some operate as sole traders, which means that they are responsible for leasing or purchasing a vehicle and managing the necessary licenses, insurance, vehicle maintenance, passenger record keeping and financial accounts (Startups.co.uk, 2016). Alternatively, self-employed drivers may contract to undertake work on behalf of a licensed cab company. The majority of these are small businesses and contracts often involve an individual using their own vehicle and paying a proportion of their earnings to the operator for their pre-booking services (National Private Hire Association, 2020). However, some larger companies have their own fleet of vehicles, which they rent to cab drivers for a monthly fee

covering the vehicle lease, insurance and pre-booking service costs (Addison Lee, 2020).

This prevalence of self-employment has been widely accepted practice in the industry historically, rather than a new phenomenon (Sherer et al., 1998). This situation has resulted in longstanding concern about the contractual vulnerability of the many self-employed cab drivers who lack state employment protection, cover for illness or pension provision (Coiquaud; 2009). However, this issue has gained traction in recent years, as the rise in precarious contracts more widely across the labour market has drawn attention to the fact that cab drivers make up one of the UK's largest groups of self-employed workers (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Additionally, the rapid growth of Uber internationally has not only focused the spotlight on the high rates of self-employment in the industry, but resulted in legal challenges concerning the contractual status of cab drivers (Emmott, 2015).

However, it has also been proposed that being contracted as a self-employed cab driver offers opportunities for flexible working. Round-the-clock demand for cab services means that shift work is available, as well as part-time hours to help cover particularly busy times at evenings and weekends (National Careers Service, 2020). Additionally, unlike other road transport services, there is no legal restriction on the hours that cab drivers can work (Butcher, 2016; European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2010). It is therefore possible to work as a cab driver for anything from a few hours a week, to undertaking an unlimited volume of work on a full-time basis. The potential attraction of cab driving as flexible work is then reflected in it having become a central feature of some job advertising, which highlights the possibility of driving 'where you want, whenever you want' (Uber, 2020).

4.3.3 Dirty work

There is a longstanding association in the literature between cab driving and dirty work. In classifying cab driving, some widely used taxonomies have focused traditionally on the 'driving' element of this job. For example, SOC

(2020) identifies a category of 'Taxi and cab drivers and chauffeurs,' which is a subset of the 'Process, Plant and Machine Operatives' group. Other types of work in this group include road transport roles such as lorry and train driving. Similarly, in Holland's (1973; 1997) six work environment types, cab driving is classified alongside roles such as lorry driving as a 'Realistic' job type. This category emphasises a preference for undertaking practical and mechanical tasks, rather than engaging with and helping people. In doing so, both classifications effectively categorise cab driving as 'manual' work that involves engaging with a physical task (McMurray & Ward, 2014). Undertaking this type of work has then often been stigmatised as dirty work, on the basis that it involves physical engagement with dirty work environments such as a motorised cab vehicle (Ashforth et al., 2007), rather than relatively 'clean' office-based work (Diemer & Ali, 2009).

Whilst cab driving has often been classified alongside jobs such as lorry driving, there has been increasing recognition in recent years that a key element of the work involves engaging directly with customers (People 1st, 2016). This includes managing the initial encounter with a passenger, potentially helping them with luggage, as well as conversing during the journey (National Careers Service, 2020). Whilst this relationship has been identified typically as a 'fleeting' one (Davis, 1959, p. 158), the construction and maintenance of that relationship can form an integral part of cab driving work (People 1st, 2016). As a result, new training courses have been devised which focus on improving cab drivers' customer service skills (City & Guilds, 2019). Conceptualising cab driving as customer service work does not, however, preclude it from being perceived as dirty work. For example, a study by Cassell and Bishop (2014) illustrates how social taint can arise from the servile positioning of the cab driver in this relationship. Additionally, suspicion about the financial exploitation of customers can result in perceptions of moral taint, whilst having to deal with abusive, inebriated or vomiting customers might induce a sense of physical taint. Several different elements of the cab driving job role can therefore be constructed as dirty work.

Finally, cab driving has been ranked consistently across international status scales in a low position in terms of occupational prestige (Ashforth et al., 2007;

Boyd, 2008; Jones & McMillan, 2001). This reflects a variety of features inherent to cab driving work, including its minimal educational requirements, routine nature and low rates of pay (Boyd, 2008). The widespread perception of cab driving as a low-prestige occupation then has implications for individuals working in the industry, not least because it can result in the stigmatisation of an entire occupation as dirty work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). The result of this is that cab drivers are likely to struggle with a personal sense of taint associated with their work (Ashforth et al., 2007), as well as facing challenges in constructing a positive career identity (Cassell & Bishop, 2014).

4.3.4 Summary

Across both the academic literature and wider society, cab driving has been characterised and debated as not only low-skilled, but also precarious and dirty work. As such it would appear to offer few opportunities for individuals to achieve any substantive income, contractual security or career development. Furthermore, whilst some major employers in the industry have sought to promote cab driving as flexible work, contractual arrangements are at the same time being legally contested in the courts. Whilst the availability of cab driving jobs continues to grow, concern has therefore also been expressed about the quality and security of such work.

4.4 Cab Driving as a Career

In line with the conceptualisation of career set out in the last chapter, this current chapter now moves on to examine what can be inferred more specifically from the literature about cab driving from both a career narrative and career boundary perspective. It begins by assessing the extent to which the existing literature can provide any evidence of career boundaries associated with cab driving and how they might be perceived by cab drivers themselves. The discussion then goes on to consider whether the literature can provide insights into how these career boundary experiences might shape different types of cab driving career narratives.

4.4.1 Types of Career Boundary

There is evidence from the literature of different types of career boundaries associated with cab driving work, which are summarised in Table 4.1. This includes a distinct occupation boundary that differentiates cab driving from other forms of work. Cab drivers can be conceptualised as an occupational community that consists of 'a group of people who consider themselves to be engaged in the same sort of work' (Van Maanen, 2010). However, the distinctiveness of cab driving as a bounded occupational domain is evidenced through its recognition by widely recognised occupation taxonomies such as SOC (2020). Such classifications are the outcome of a negotiated consensus over time by key stakeholders such as the state, regulatory bodies, trade representatives, business and education groups about the bounded scope of particular types of work (Elias & Birch, 2010; Montgomery & Oliver, 2007). In the case of cab driving, the establishment of licensing regulations (Appendix 2), standardised job profiles (Appendix 3) and skill training programs (Appendix 4) all support the notion of a longstanding, widely recognised occupation boundary, which individuals have to cross in order to access this particular form of work.

Beyond the occupation boundary, the literature also highlights a number of distinct cab driving jobs and associated boundaries. Licensing regulations differentiate between minicab and taxi driving job roles, with licensing requirements for the latter being more stringent (Butcher, 2016). Taxi driving work can also be further divided according to whether it is undertaken outside London, or within the capital as a black cab driver who has completed The Knowledge training program (London Assembly Transport Committee, 2014). Beyond this, the rise of online technology cab driving business during the past decade has brought about the emergence of a new job category termed an 'Uber' driver in line with that particular company's name (Transport for London, 2015). So, job boundaries can be identified which differentiate specific types of work that individuals might undertake within the cab driving industry.

Table 4.1 Cab Driving Career Boundaries

CAREER BOUNDARY TYPE	SUB-CATEGORIES
1. Occupation	N/A
2. Organisation	• Sole Trader • Small Licensed Operator • Large Licensed Operator
3. Job	• Minicab Driver • Taxi Driver • Black Cab Driver
4. Work/Life	N/A
5. Geographic	• London • Outside London Districts

There is also useful evidence from the literature regarding different types of cab driving organisations and their associated boundaries. A cab driver might set up as a sole trader running a business with its own distinct organisation boundary. This would include the business owner dealing with all licensing regulations themselves, providing a suitable vehicle and contracting directly with customers (Startups.co.uk, 2020). Alternatively, a cab driver might cross an existing organisation boundary to sign up to work with an established cab firm. This boundary crossing process would require negotiating with employer gatekeepers and completing their recruitment requirements successfully. This could involve a formal interview (Reed.co.uk, 2020; Yellow Cars London, 2020), or simply attending an information workshop and completing licensing and vehicle checks (Uber, 2020). However, it may be possible to lease a car from a company for a monthly fee covering the vehicle hire, insurance, and pre-booking fees (Addison Lee, 2020). Working as a cab driver will therefore involve

crossing and working within organisation boundaries associated with the industry.

The current devolving of licensing arrangements to local authorities means that geographic boundaries are also evident. This arises because licensing terms vary from one local authority district to another, so that the precise nature of any regulations that an individual has to meet will be determined by the location in which they become licensed. This is usually the area in which they live, or an adjacent local authority, because cab drivers are restricted to picking up passengers from within their licensed district (Law Commission, 2014). In London, individuals therefore have the option to apply for a minicab license, or invest in the extensive training and more costly licensing that is required to become a black cab driver (Transport for London, 2016). Becoming licensed as a taxi driver in other local authority districts is a far less onerous process though, involving only recognition of key routes and locations in that particular area (Local Government Association, 2015). However, anyone already licensed as a cab driver would have to apply for a new license if they relocated to work in a different local authority district.

Finally, there is some discussion in the literature about work/life boundary issues in the context of cab driving. Concern has been expressed about the long hours that some cab drivers have to work in order to earn sufficient income (Department for Transport, 2019). This includes anecdotal evidence of some cab drivers working in excess of 60 hours per week (People 1st, 2016). However, there are also occasional reports that some cab drivers actively choose to work only a few hours each week in order to enable them to manage childcare responsibilities, or as a way of earning additional income whilst studying or setting up a business (Butcher, 2016). This suggests that cab drivers might experience and manage the work/life boundary in different ways, ranging from engaging with cab driving as flexible work, to having to work very long hours.

Examining the literature from a career boundary perspective therefore highlights evidence of different types of career boundaries associated with cab driving. These include occupation, job, organisation, geographic and work/life

boundaries. This is interesting because it illustrates how cab drivers may encounter multiple career boundaries, both on entry to this occupation and as they go about their day-to-day work. The focus of interest in this study is then upon which career boundaries they might perceive to be particularly salient. This may include some of the types of career boundary already identified here, but also others that are not evident from the literature.

4.4.2 Perceptions of Career Boundaries

This section moves on to explore any evidence regarding the different ways in which cab drivers might perceive career boundaries associated with their work. Making the initial transition into cab driving work involves an individual negotiating across the occupation boundary into a variety of potential jobs and organisations. In principle, many people appear eligible to cross this occupation boundary into work that requires only a valid driving license, limited education qualifications and is accessible to individuals living in most geographic locations (National Careers Service, 2020). No maximum age limits have ever been set for working as a cab driver either, making it possible for individuals to transition into this occupation even at a late career stage, so long as an applicant is medically fit (Law Commission, 2014). This suggests that most people might be expected to regard the occupation boundary as a relatively permeable one that might be crossed easily by anyone seeking ready access to employment.

However, research has identified that licensing arrangements have the potential to hinder career mobility by restricting access to low-skilled occupations such as cab driving in a number of ways. This includes the application of quotas that limit the number of licenses that can be issued, as well as the cost implications for applicants of having to pay for licenses (Hazlett & Fearing, 1998; Love et al., 2010). Furthermore, whilst only taxi services were licensed historically, from the mid 1970s minicab licensing was introduced outside London, before being extended to the London area from 2001 onwards (Butcher, 2016). The cab driving occupation boundary has therefore become more codified over time, in the sense that everyone transitioning into cab driving work now has to engage with licensing gatekeepers. This raises the possibility that an increasing number

of people may perceive the cab driving occupation boundary as more challenging to cross than it might have been historically.

Contemporary licensing regulations also automatically preclude some groups from undertaking cab driving work. For example, most local authority districts require cab drivers to be aged at least 21 for insurance purposes (Local Government Association, 2015). Individuals also need to pass any driving and navigation tests set by their local authority (Local Government Association, 2015), as well as pass a medical and Disclosure and Barring Service check (National Careers Service, 2020). Existing drivers can also have their license revoked if they develop a serious health condition or are charged with offences such as driving an unsafe vehicle, speeding, drug-taking or fraud (Copsey & Taylor, 2010; Hoffman, 2008; Machin & De Souza, 2004). These examples illustrate how not everyone may perceive this low-skilled occupation boundary as permeable and for those who fail to meet the required entry criteria it may actually represent a barrier to career mobility.

The cab driving occupation boundary is also a potentially complex one in the sense that it offers different routes into the industry. For example, an individual may become licensed initially as a minicab, taxi or black cab driver (Law Commission, 2014). Becoming a minicab driver can be achieved at a lower cost and more quickly than a taxi or black cab driver, taking on average a few weeks (National Private Hire Association, 2020). In contrast, a small body of research has highlighted the challenges of undertaking The Knowledge training in order to become a black cab driver, which may take several years and is associated with a high failure rate (Ross, 2007; McMunn, 2013). Potential cab driving applicants also have to decide whether to work for themselves or apply for work with a small/large employer (Butcher, 2016). The details of these various boundary crossing routes are set out on local authority websites (Local Government Association, 2015) and large employer websites (Addison Lee, 2020; Uber, 2020; Yellow Cars London, 2020), which detail the different licensing and recruitment arrangements. It is therefore possible that whilst some individuals may perceive that they have a choice of boundary crossing routes into cab driving, others may not and failing a particular licensing process might prevent access altogether.

The literature has less to offer in terms of insights into how cab drivers might perceive career boundaries once they have transitioned into the industry. However, we might speculate that if career boundaries associated with minicab driving jobs are perceived as relatively permeable, individuals might go on to undertake job-hopping between them if they wish to do so. At the same time, transitioning into minicab driving may be perceived as crossing a boundary into a lower-status cab driving role, because of the perceived ease of access (Gilligan, 2016). In contrast, the time, money and effort to complete The Knowledge might be perceived as crossing a career boundary into a higher status job role. Certainly, training as a black cab driver has captured the public imagination and led to books and films about the experience (Townsend, 2009). It is also possible that some might perceive geographic boundaries as problematic, requiring them to become relicensed if they have to relocate to a different local authority district. In terms of the work/life boundary, some could regard cab driving as usefully flexible work, or alternatively feel that that they have to work long hours to make ends meet. It is therefore possible to identify some different ways in which individuals may perceive career boundaries associated with cab driving work.

4.4.3 Constructing Career Narratives

Much of the literature associated with cab driving work characterises it as problematic work, which implies that individuals would construct regressive career narratives. In particular, the routine nature of cab driving work, low pay rates, the prevalence of self-employment and low status ratings identified earlier in this chapter suggest that opportunities to construct a meaningful career appear limited. However, taking a boundary-focused approach as outlined in the sections above hints at the potential for more nuanced narrative plotlines to be constructed by cab drivers. Based upon the conceptualisation detailed in Chapter 3, cab drivers' varied career boundary experiences may result in the construction of different types of career narrative. For example, cab driving career narratives might include accounts of what led up to crossing the occupation boundary, when it was encountered, whether it was possible to access a boundary crossing route of choice and how they felt about that

process. On the one hand, an enforced boundary crossing into cab driving following redundancy might be constructed as a regressive turning point in a career narrative. However, someone who opted to take up cab driving as a means of accessing work that utilises their driving skills might construct it as a progressive turning point.

Beyond the occupation boundary, other salient career boundary experiences might also shape the particular type of career narrative that is constructed. After entering cab driving individuals might remain within, or cross job, organisation and geographic boundaries. Additionally, they would need to manage the work/life boundary on a day-to-day basis. Some career boundary experiences may then contribute to the construction of a regressive plotline. This could include feeling trapped within a stressful minicab job boundary, contracted by a large employer with little control over scheduling of customers, as well as working long hours. However, other career boundary experiences might contribute to shaping progressive plotlines, such as crossing a job boundary into a preferred taxi role, setting-up a successful business and working hours of choice. The varied interplay of different cab driving career boundary experiences may therefore shape regressive, progressive and potentially other types of career narrative plotline.

4.4.4 Summary

By taking a boundary-focused approach to examining the literature, it is possible to find evidence of career boundaries associated with cab driving as an occupation, as well as specific types of job, organisations, geographic areas and the work/life domains. These boundaries differentiate and structure cab driving work, by demarcating the occupation itself and other key domains associated with it. The career boundaries identified in this chapter are not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather offer examples of career boundaries that can be identified from the existing literature. Additionally, there is evidence that individuals may interpret these boundaries in different ways. For example, this might include perceiving the occupation boundary as anything from a barrier to accessing cab driving work, to offering multiple routes into the

industry. Collectively, encounters with multiple career boundaries and the different ways in which they may be construed can be seen to have the potential to shape both regressive and progressive cab driving career narratives.

4.5 Conclusion

In reviewing a variety of academic and grey literature, this chapter has identified a prevailing view in which cab driving work has been classified typically as low-skilled, dirty and precarious work. The fact that few formal qualifications are required by the industry implies that this work is readily accessible. However, limited opportunities for achieving a substantive income, job satisfaction or any sense of career progression are evident from the literature. Taking a boundary-focused approach offers a different perspective though. It highlights how the subjective experience of transitioning into this occupation and constructing a cab driving career may in fact be a more complex and nuanced process than has been previously acknowledged. Career boundaries may help individuals to make sense of how the industry is structured, but also prevent some people transitioning into cab driving, or restrict access to particular job roles. Individuals will also have to manage boundary issues on a daily basis and may go on to cross boundaries into different job roles and organisations. Furthermore, subjective perceptions of these boundary processes may vary, resulting in the construction of different types of cab driving career narratives. It is with these subjective interpretations that this thesis is concerned and goes on to investigate.

CHAPTER 5 RESEARCH METHODS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methods that I used to investigate the research questions underpinning this study. My aim is to provide an orderly account of the process, but also acknowledge challenges that I encountered along the way and how they were resolved. The emergent nature of qualitative research (Silverman, 2013) meant that the research process was sometimes 'confusing, messy, intensely frustrating, and fundamentally nonlinear' (Marshall & Rossman, 2015, p. 65). Conducting qualitative research has also been identified as 'a rich, complex and multi-level experience that mobilises the whole person conducting this inquiry' (Sergi & Hallin, 2011, p. 192). This chapter therefore seeks to provide a transparent account of how the data collection and analysis unfolded, the key choices that were taken and my own role as researcher in shaping this process.

The chapter begins with an overview of the narrative research design, which provides context for the remainder of the chapter. An account of the data collection process follows, which describes organising and undertaking narrative interviews with 32 cab drivers. Two stages of data analysis were then undertaken and are explained in turn. The first involved using thematic analysis to examine the types of boundaries that cab drivers identified as salient in the context of their career narrative, as well as why they perceived them as important. A second stage of narrative analysis is then described, which sought to interpret and categorise the variety of different types of narrative that were constructed by cab drivers. This account therefore works through key stages of

the research method, from its initial design to the way in which data was collected and analysed in practice.

5.2 Research Design

The research design for this thesis is informed by ideas about narrative, which requires clarification because narrative investigations can vary substantially from one study to another (Robert & Shenhav, 2014). The ontological assumptions set out previously in Chapter 3 identified a constructivist position that is rooted in narrative. The presumption is that cab drivers construct their own reality in relation to the world around them through the means of a career narrative. It was established in Chapter 3 that whilst career boundaries evolve through social practices, the focus of interest in this thesis is on how cab drivers perceive those boundaries once they become established as 'social facts' (Gunz et al., 2007, p. 475). In terms of epistemology, the thesis seeks to understand the subjective meaning that each cab driver constructs through their career narrative, rather than a single objective truth (Bujold, 2004). Furthermore, there is recognition that a researcher is not a neutral observer, but an influential part of investigating and interpreting subjective meaning (Duberley et al., 2012). The research design therefore needed to align with these ontological and epistemological positions, in order to answer the research questions that underpin this thesis:

How are cab drivers' career narratives shaped by career boundaries?

1. Which career boundaries do cab drivers identify as salient in their career narratives?
2. Why do cab drivers perceive these career boundaries as salient?
3. What type of career narrative do cab drivers construct about their career boundary experiences?

Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were employed as a means of addressing these research questions. From a data collection perspective, a research method was required that would enable the construction and recording of a cab driver's career narrative. The data analysis process then needed to

examine career boundary issues within the context of those career narratives, as well as investigate the narrative plotline form of each account. Beyond this, the research design also needed to address ethical, reflexivity and quality criteria and these issues are discussed in turn.

5.2.1 Narrative Research

The research design involved collecting narrative data through in-depth interviews, before going on to use thematic analysis and narrative plotline analysis to explore that data. In doing so, this study draws on established methods, but was also shaped by my prior experience of investigating career narratives in a study of occupational embeddedness in the teaching profession (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2011). That study provided me with insights into both the benefits and challenges of using narrative methods in an empirical setting. Whilst undertaking narrative research interviews during that study, I also experienced personal challenges with role conflict because of their potential to mirror the career counselling processes that I engage with as a practitioner. Undertaking this thesis then provided an opportunity to draw on those experiences, address procedural gaps with some of the methods that I had already encountered, as well as proactively manage any personal role conflict issues. My prior research experience therefore had some impact upon the selection and development of the research methods employed in this thesis.

5.2.1.1 Collecting Data

I decided to conduct and record face-to-face narrative interviews with a sample group of cab drivers. Alternatives might have involved, for example, undertaking telephone/online interviews or asking participants to write about their working lives (King & Horrocks, 2012). However, initial discussions with local cab drivers, as well as researchers who had undertaken studies in this industry (Cassell & Bishop, 2014; Elaluf-Calderwood, 2009), indicated that participants would be most comfortable speaking directly with an interviewer. This decision was further supported by the fact that there is a well-established practice in

qualitative research of collecting data through face-to-face interviews (Wolgemuth et al., 2015). A narrative approach to interviewing specifically encourages participants to construct storied accounts about their personal experiences (Riessman, 2008). This involves the researcher building an effective research alliance to encourage the participant in the role of storyteller (Gabriel, 2009). Another key feature of narrative research interviews is that whilst the researcher may pose some 'generative narrative questions,' the interview process is largely unstructured (Flick, 2006, p.184). The aim is to encourage the construction of temporal and rich narratives, which can be recorded and transcribed as empirical data (Riessman, 2010). The fieldwork process itself is described in more detail later in this chapter.

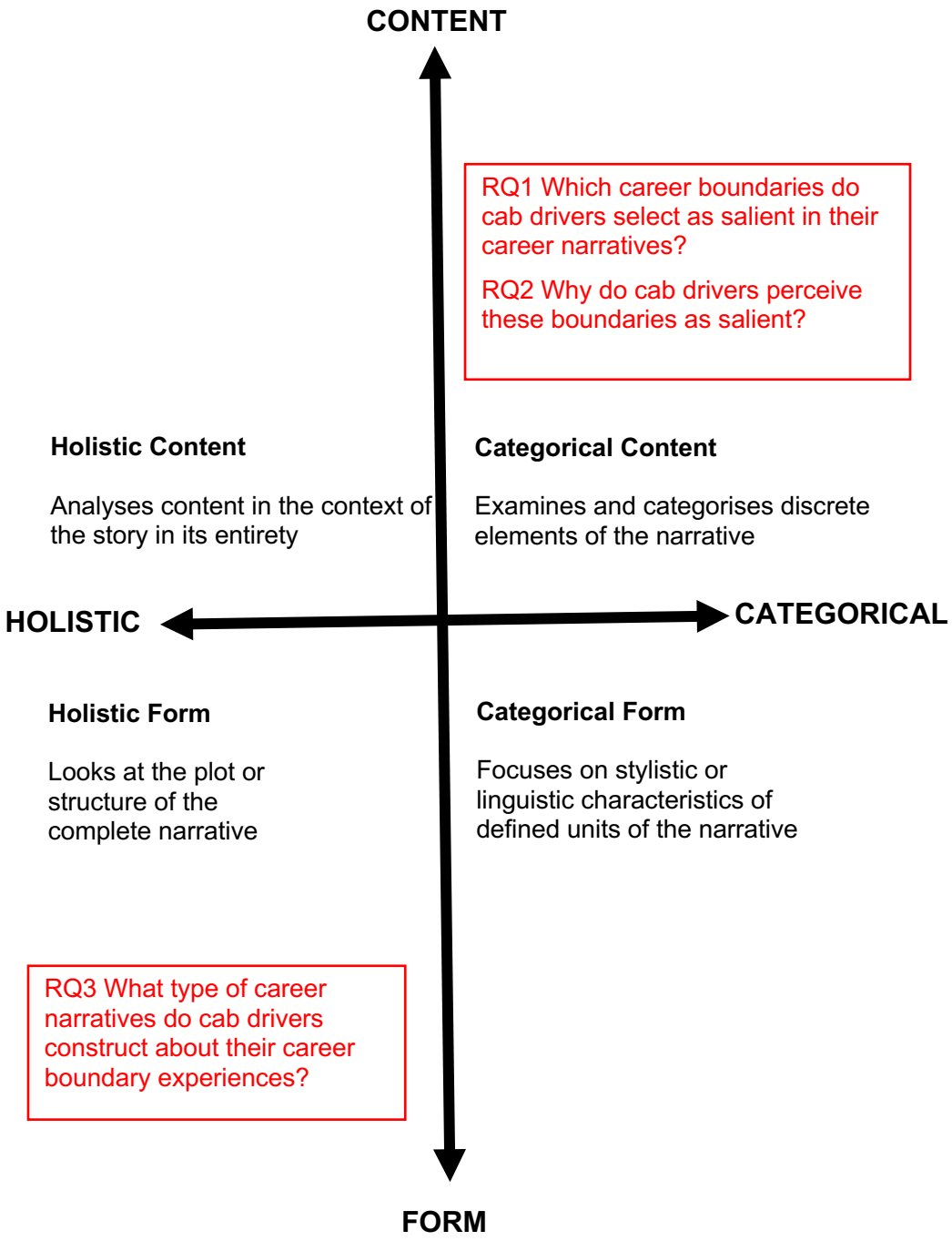
5.2.1.2 Analysing Data

In order to make sense of the 'multitude of different ways in which researchers can engage with the narrative properties of their data' (Elliott, 2005 p. 37), the analysis process is located within Lieblich et al.'s (1998) narrative research framework. This framework classifies the analysis of narrative data on the basis of two dimensions (Figure 5.1). The first is concerned with the unit of analysis, which may be the analysis of sub-sections of text within the narrative (categorical), or the entire narrative account (holistic). The second dimension differentiates individual events that are described as happening in a narrative (content), from over-arching issues such as narrative plot (form). Four 'modes' of reading a narrative then emerge: holistic-content, holistic-form, categorical-content and categorical-form. A study may then employ one or more of these different analytic modes.

A 'categorical-content' approach was employed in this thesis to address Research Questions [RQ] 1 and 2 (Figure 5.1). This was because identifying salient career boundaries and why cab drivers might perceive them as important demanded the analysis of only those subsections of a narrative relating to these particular issues. More specifically, template analysis was used as a means of examining the relevant data (King, 1998; 2012; 2020). This is a form of thematic analysis which systematically identifies and interprets key

themes within a data set. A ‘holistic-form’ mode of analysis was then used to explore Research Question [RQ] 3 (Figure 5.1), which was concerned with the different types of cab driving career narratives that participants constructed. The method employed in this study is based upon Gergen and Gergen’s (1984) notion of narrative emplotment, which forms part of the conceptualisation of career set out in Chapter 3. The associated data analysis process involves interpreting narrative plotlines, which has been used as a way of classifying different types of career experiences (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2011; Lieblich et al., 1998; Young, Friesen, & Borycki, 1994). The method used to undertake narrative plotline analysis in this thesis drew upon these existing studies and is explained in detail later in this chapter.

Figure 5.1 Narrative Analysis Framework (Lieblich et al., 1998)



5.2.2 Ethics

Any academic study needs to anticipate ethical issues and identify how they might be managed, because 'ethical dilemmas and concerns are part of the everyday practice of doing research - all kinds of research' (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 162). An ethical review was therefore undertaken prior to undertaking the fieldwork, in line with university guidelines (Drury, 2019). This included preparing information sheets for participants outlining the nature of the study, as well as consent forms (Appendix 5). Whilst this research did not involve investigating a sensitive topic and was classified as 'routine,' a number of specific issues were highlighted during this review process that required addressing. In particular, the decision to undertake face-to-face, narrative interviews had ethical implications and these are identified in more detail here.

The key characteristics of qualitative research interviewing involve a personal interaction between the researcher and participants, a relatively unstructured interview schedule and an in-depth discussion (Allmark et al., 2009). Collectively, these features make it difficult to anticipate what issues the interview process will touch upon, the information that is disclosed and any emotions this might engender (Josselson, 2007). Additionally, Hart and Crawford-Wright (1999, p. 205) identify that it can sometimes be 'difficult to tell the difference between a therapeutic relationship and a research interview,' because of their in-depth, personal and reflective nature. As a result, some researchers have reported that qualitative research interviews can have therapeutic outcomes (Birch & Miller, 2000: Haynes, 2006). This is not to suggest that interviews will always have a therapeutic effect. Interview experiences might also prove a positive and interesting experience for the participant (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). As the researcher, however, it was necessary to anticipate these issues and put procedures in place to manage them on behalf of both participants and myself.

5.2.2.1 Participant Perspectives

A researcher is responsible for ensuring the voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and avoidance of harm of participants (Economic and Social Research Council, 2020). In order to address the relatively unstructured and unpredictable nature of narrative interviewing, I decided to not only gain written consent from participants prior to their interview, but also check and record their verbal consent at the end of that interview. This meant that participants had an opportunity to reflect back on their interview and reconfirm their consent once it was completed. Participants were also advised of their right to have the recording suspended, as well as withdraw from the study at any stage should they wish to do so. Anonymity issues were addressed by confirming that the names of all participants and any individuals or companies that they mentioned in their interviews would be changed in the subsequent writing-up and reporting of the study. Furthermore, I opted not to specify the county district in England in which the fieldwork was undertaken, in order to further ensure the anonymity of all participants.

As identified in the previous section of this chapter, my career counselling practitioner role meant that I brought experience to the research setting of managing in-depth interviews. From an ethical perspective, the benefits included understanding and managing the potential for narrative interviews to unfold in an unpredictable and possibly emotive way. In my career counselling role, I had learnt to 'maintain equilibrium, go on listening and hold…the emotional experiences' being recounted (Josselson, 2007 p. 543). Being aware of and managing role boundaries is also a key element of counselling training (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 2020). I therefore explained to participants prior to the interview that I was acting in my capacity as a researcher, rather than as a career counsellor. This was to clarify that I would be unable to offer careers advice during the interview, but details of the National Careers Service free telephone advice line (National Careers Service, 2020) were provided in case participants wished to seek out support after their interview.

A more complex issue concerned the potential for therapeutic effect to arise during an interview. In theory there is a clear distinction between counselling and research, because 'as a counsellor people seek me out: as a researcher I seek them' (Etherington, 2004). In practice though, techniques such as active listening that are used in both settings can encourage self-reflection and have a therapeutic outcome (Allmark et al., 2009). Additionally, research participants can have varied motivations for agreeing to participate in a study, with some unconsciously seeking to use their interview for therapeutic purposes (Holmes, 2013; Peel et al., 2006). At the same time, there is debate in the counselling field about the precise nature and measurement of therapeutic effect (Mcleod, 2009). My counselling experience was therefore helpful in appreciating the complexity of these issues and underlined a need to actively monitor role boundaries and manage participants' expectations about the nature of the interview.

5.2.2.2 Researcher Perspectives

Beyond ensuring the care of participants, a researcher also has a responsibility to identify and minimise any harm to themselves that might arise through the research process. In this study a key issue concerned my physical safety as a female researcher out in the field, particularly as the gendered nature of the cab driving population meant that I was likely to be interviewing mostly men (Bloor et al., 2010; Parker & O'Reilly, 2013; Pollard, 2009). I therefore drew up and followed a set of safety protocols, based upon best practice guidelines (Drury, 2019; Paterson et al., 1999; Social Research Association, 2014). These protocols covered arrangements for recruiting participants, interview scheduling and meeting arrangements (Appendix 6).

A second issue concerned the potential for role conflict to arise between my career researcher and practitioner roles. On the one hand, counselling practitioners have been identified as skilled at undertaking in-depth, qualitative interviews (Etherington, 2004). However, at the same time the format of research interviews can mirror counselling interviews and cause problems for the interviewer in managing role boundaries (Etherington, 1996). In order to

manage this issue, I incorporated additional counselling supervision into the fieldwork process. This can 'provide an element of support for the researcher and an element of protection for the participant' (Hart & Crawford-Wright, 1999, p. 213) by ensuring that role boundaries are adhered to. The purpose of setting up this additional supervision was to discuss and manage the boundary between my researcher and practitioner roles, in order to minimise the emotional labour associated with researcher-practitioner role conflict (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). This supervision was perceived as part of a broader reflexivity strategy and is explained in more detail in the following section.

5.2.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity has become established as a fundamental requirement of qualitative research (Kumsa et al, 2015). However, its definition, precise role and the means by which it can be achieved are the subject of much debate (Berger, 2015; Johnson & Duberley, 2003; Tomkins & Eatough, 2010). It can also be difficult to strike a balance between embedding reflexivity within a study, whilst avoiding unproductive and endless self-scrutiny (Finlay, 2002a; Van Maanen, 1988). My starting point for this study was to recognise that as the researcher I am 'a central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection and interpretation of data' (Finlay, 2002b, p. 212). This included recognising my role as a 'primary instrument' in the research interview process (Pezella et al., 2012, p. 166). It was then necessary to identify and set in place reflexive practices that would enable me to make sense of and report on my own role in shaping this study.

The reflexivity strategy that I developed was influenced by two key issues. First, reflexivity is embedded in my practitioner role as a career counsellor, where it involves both personal reflection and engaging with counselling supervision (McLeod, 2009). Second, I wanted to fully exploit researcher reflexivity as a means of addressing any ethical issues arising from this study. As a researcher, it has been suggested that:

> Being reflexive in an ethical sense means acknowledging and being sensitized to the microethical dimensions of research practice and in doing so, being alert to and prepared for ways of dealing with the ethical tensions that arise' (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 278).

Researcher reflexivity can therefore include staying alert to ethical issues throughout the research process, beyond completing an ethical review at the outset of a study. The process involves being actively attentive on a day-to-day basis to the potential for ethical tensions to arise and then seeking practical ways of managing them as the research process unfolds. Reflexivity was therefore regarded in this study as a key means of identifying, engaging with and resolving ethical issues.

A key reflexivity tool involved keeping two types of research journals. The first took the form of a diary, which I kept throughout the research process. This approach has been recommended as a means of promoting regular personal reflexivity (Haynes, 2012). I used this document to record research ideas and challenges that arose along the way. Reflecting on these issues via the medium of a diary helped to provide perspective and identify ways forward. Once I was underway with undertaking research interviews, I also set-up and maintained a separate fieldwork journal. I used this to make notes on progress with developing leads and establishing contact with potential research participants. I also used it to record my thoughts after undertaking each research interview (Malacrida, 2007). I did this in two stages, beginning with capturing my initial impressions of an interview shortly after it was completed. I then added a second set of notes following the transcription process, which involved engaging again with each interview in a detailed fashion. These notes focused on issues such as the nature of the research location, my impressions of the interview itself, how I felt listening to it, as well as any ethical observations. I then drew on this fieldwork diary as a resource during the data analysis stages of the study.

Engaging with supervisory processes also provided an important opportunity for reflexivity. I had regular meetings with my academic supervisor throughout the research process. This involved discussing ideas from developing the original research proposal, to identifying ways forward with research design, data

analysis and ethical challenges. This process encouraged reflexivity because it required me to assess progress and challenged me to think about and justify routes forward. Additionally, I arranged counselling supervision to manage the potential for researcher-practitioner role conflict to arise during the fieldwork process. This is common practice within the counselling profession, providing impartial third-party oversight, advice and support with client caseloads. Within the research field itself, counselling supervision has been used as a means of processing the emotional labour associated with in-depth research interviewing (Cordon et al, 2005; Elliott et al., 2012; Johnson, 2009). This type of support can also help researchers to manage and maintain role boundaries in fieldwork settings (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2014; Dickson-Swift et al, 2008). Counselling supervision can therefore provide a valuable means of strengthening ethical practice in qualitative research.

The counselling supervision process itself unfolded through three stages and is detailed in Appendix 7. The preparatory stage covered all preliminary discussions and contracting. I then discussed role conflict issues with my counselling supervisor as they arose during the fieldwork process: what triggered them and ways of managing them. For example, I found it challenging to deal with fieldwork interviews in which participants described substantive problems with cab driving as a career. This went beyond them sometimes simply disliking the work, to describing substantive problems with issues such as mental health triggered by their work experiences. As a career counsellor, I would be in a position to offer support with these issues and follow-up with additional meetings to help resolve them. As a researcher though, my primary role was to listen and record an interview, before moving on to meeting the next participant. Whilst I did advise participants who were struggling with their career to seek out support, I was often left with a strong sense of unfinished business. This was an issue that proved helpful to discuss in a counselling supervision session, as a means of processing the interview experience and then moving on with the fieldwork. The final counselling supervision session took place shortly after the fieldwork, to review and reflect upon the process as a whole.

5.2.4 Quality Criteria

As qualitative approaches to research have evolved, there has been recognition that positivist measures of validity and reliability cannot be offered as evidence of research quality (Duberley et al., 2012). Instead, a variety of alternative criteria have been established, which aim to improve the evaluation, standing and legitimacy of qualitative studies (Bansal & Corley, 2011; Cassell & Symon, 2006; Fossey et al, 2002; Morrow, 2005). These all highlight the importance of establishing transparency and trustworthiness in data collection and analysis processes, as well as the presentation of results (Aguinis & Vandenberg, 2013; Hunt, 2011). This study was evaluated throughout the research process against Tracy's (2010) eight quality criteria, because they are widely acknowledged and address a broad set of issues that arise in the context of conducting qualitative research (Bansal & Corley, 2011; Carrera-Fernandez et al., 2012; Symon et al., 2018). These criteria are as follows: worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, meaningful coherence.

An extensive literature review is provided in Chapter 2 in order to establish that investigating how individuals may interpret low-skilled work from a career perspective is a *worthy topic*, in the sense that it addresses an important research gap. Additionally, Chapter 3 sets out in detail the constructivist positioning of this study and the rationale for proposing that career narratives are shaped by career boundaries. *Rich rigor* is evidenced across this research methods chapter by detailing the decisions that were taken in developing the research design, undertaking the fieldwork, as well as clarifying the steps taken in undertaking the data analysis. *Sincerity* is demonstrated through the development and reporting of an in-depth reflexivity strategy, which includes acknowledging my own role in shaping this study.

Research *credibility* is evidenced in Chapters 6 and 7 which focus upon the findings and provide substantive extracts directly from the data set. Issues of *resonance and contribution* are addressed in the final chapter, which highlights substantive contributions to knowledge and ideas for follow-up research. The *ethical challenges* of undertaking narrative research and managing my own personal researcher-practitioner role boundaries are fully acknowledged in this

chapter and the thesis reports on the practical measures that were put in place to monitor and address them. Finally, in order to demonstrate *meaningful coherence*, the thesis seeks to present a consistent argument by drawing together and unifying the aims of this study, its theoretical positioning, methods and subsequent outcomes arising from the research process.

5.3 Data Collection

The fieldwork stage of this study involved undertaking 32 face-to-face, narrative interviews with a sample group of cab drivers living in a county bordering onto the London area in the UK. They were recruited using a snowball sampling method and the fieldwork unfolded over a period of six months, during which time I transcribed the interviews myself. Additionally, I met with my academic supervisor monthly to discuss the fieldwork, as well as undertaking six counselling supervision sessions to specifically address role boundary management issues that arose during the research interviews. The fieldwork stage therefore involved not only collecting data, but also reflecting regularly on how the process was unfolding. The following sections describe in more detail how participants were recruited, the interview process and transcription.

5.3.1 Sample Group

Prior to commencing the main fieldwork, I investigated a number of different ways of recruiting participants. I began by contacting two researchers who had undertaken qualitative studies in the cab driving trade. Both reported challenges with recruiting cab drivers, which they had resolved in different ways. One had used personal contacts to access participants via London black cab companies (Elaluf-Calderwood, 2009). The other had approached cab drivers on taxi ranks and incentivised their cooperation by offering shopping vouchers (Cassell & Bishop, 2014). Both identified that face-to-face interviews helped to establish rapport and trust with participants in these studies. In the light of their experiences, I contacted the owners of several large cab firms and a local authority that issues cab driving licenses, but none were willing to allow access

to interview their cab drivers. Instead, a snowball sampling approach proved a successful way of building the sample group. This has been identified as a useful way of accessing hard to reach populations, as it starts with a small set of personal contacts who then put the researcher in touch with other potential participants (Goodman, 2011).

I commenced the fieldwork by interviewing a local cab driver who I knew personally and then followed-up with his network of contacts. In order to assist this process, I prepared an information flyer for participants to pass on to their colleagues (Appendix 8). The fieldwork then developed in four distinct phases which are identified in Table 5.1. The first phase involved interviewing cab drivers in my own home locality. These local cab drivers worked primarily as sole traders offering general minicab and specialist airport services in a rural locality, but they put me in touch with other colleagues further afield. This resulted in a second phase of London-based interviews with black cab and minicab drivers. The third phase of interviews were based in a small town, with the agreement of two different cab company owners who were undertaking both managerial and cab driving roles. Each of these owners went on to let me interview cab drivers working for their respective organisations. Finally, a fourth phase of interviews evolved from meeting a city centre cab driver who passed on contact details of other colleagues working in that locality.

In building the sample group, it is important to acknowledge that not everyone that I approached agreed to participate in this study. Some were too busy and others were wary of being interviewed. My status as a white, middle class and female researcher-practitioner also shaped the way in which the sample group evolved. Whilst the locality in which I live is comprised of a mix of social classes, there are few individuals with an ethnic minority background. My initial contacts in the trade were therefore all from a White British category, although I did go on to interview a wider mix of ethnic groups as the fieldwork progressed. However, my gender often proved helpful, as I represented a relatively unthreatening figure in a male-dominated occupation. Finally, I found that disclosing both my researcher and practitioner roles was useful. Participants seemed reassured that as a practitioner I would be committed to ensuring that the research would be put to good practical use. My self-employed work status

as a practitioner also provided valuable common ground, particularly in appreciating that downtime from cab driving work was unpaid.

In the final sample group, the 32 participants ranged in age at the time of their interview from their early 20s to mid 60s (Table 5.1). Three were female and five were from a Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic [BAME] background. Eight participants were licensed to work in the Transport for London area as black cab drivers. The remainder were licensed as minicab or taxi drivers in a variety of local authority districts across the rest of the county. The one exception was a participant who had worked for just under a year in the trade, but had left two weeks prior to being interviewed (Driver 05). Participants had transitioned into cab driving work at early, mid and late career stages and from a variety of high and low-skilled occupations. The length of time working as a cab driver in the trade varied from less than a year to over 40 years. Finally, approximately one-third of the sample group were undertaking cab driving work on a part-time basis, whilst the remainder were full-time. The sample group identified in Table 5.1 therefore included a diverse range of participants, with varied career histories and undertaking different types of cab driving work at the time of interview.

Table 5.1 Sample Group Profile

No.	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Current licensing status	Full/ Part Time
Phase 1 Interviews Home Locality - small town/rural area					
01	30 - 34	M	White British	Minicab	FT
02	40 - 44	M	White British	Taxi	FT
03	50 - 54	M	White British	Minicab	FT
04	55 - 59	M	White British	Minicab	FT
05	30 - 34	M	White British	Minicab	FT
06	60 - 64	M	White British	Taxi	FT
07	60 - 64	M	White British	Taxi	FT
Phase 2 Interviews London based drivers					
08	55 - 59	M	White British	Black cab (Green)	FT
09	35 - 39	M	White British	Black cab (Green)	FT
10	50 - 54	M	White British	Black cab (Green)	PT
11	50 - 54	F	White British	Minicab	FT
12	40 - 44	M	White British	Black cab (Yellow)	PT
13	40 - 44	F	White British	Black cab (Yellow)	PT
14	20 - 24	M	White British	Black cab (Green)	FT
15	40 - 44	M	White British	Black cab (Green)	FT
16	50 - 54	M	White British	Black cab (Green)	PT
Phase 3 Interviews Small town cab firm A + B					
17	60 - 64	F	White British	Taxi (owner Cab Firm A)	FT
18	35 - 39	M	White British	Taxi	FT
19	60 - 64	M	White British	Taxi (owner Cab Firm B)	FT
20	55 - 59	M	White British	Taxi	FT
21	40 - 44	M	White British	Taxi	FT
22	40 - 44	M	White British	Taxi	FT
23	40 - 44	M	White British	Taxi	PT
24	50 - 54	M	White British	Taxi	PT
25	55 - 59	M	White British	Taxi	FT
26	60 - 64	M	White British	Taxi	PT
Phase 4 Interviews Large city centre					
27	35 - 39	M	BAME	Minicab	FT
28	25 - 29	M	BAME	Minicab	PT
29	40 - 44	M	BAME	Minicab	PT
30	55 - 59	M	BAME	Minicab	FT
31	50 - 54	M	White British	Minicab	FT
32	40 - 44	M	BAME	Minicab	FT

5.3.2 Narrative Interviews

Having taken the decision to undertake face-to-face narrative interviews, it was necessary to arrange to meet participants, decide on a convenient location and then manage the interview process itself. This process occurred in unexpectedly varied ways as the fieldwork unfolded through the four phases of: interviewing local drivers; travelling to meet London-based drivers; interviewing at the two cab companies; and interviews with city centre drivers. As a result, I interviewed participants in different locations, which in turn impacted on scheduling and the interview process itself and these issues are examined here.

Within my home locality two participants came to my house, I visited two others in their own homes and two more at a small cab kiosk at a local railway station. For interviews further afield I asked participants to recommend somewhere to meet, which was invariably a café or pub. Another key interview location was a small Knowledge School based in a rented room at a football club on the outskirts of London. The owner was a part-time black cab driver himself, who offered me the opportunity to interview students on site in a relatively private outdoor space. At each of the two cab firms, I spent several days at their offices and undertook interviews with cab drivers during their break times. Interviews in these companies took place in their communal rest area. As a result, there were sometimes other cab drivers sitting within earshot and therefore little privacy. However, participants seemed reassured by this familiar setting and some of their colleagues who overhead these interviews went on to be interviewed themselves, having observed the nature of participating in the study.

Prior to commencing an interview, I spent time talking each participant through the information sheet and consent form and they all gave written consent. Each interview was then recorded. Whilst narrative interviews can be relatively unstructured, I planned some key questions in advance that would seek in a deliberate way to encourage the construction of a career narrative (Squire, 2008). I wanted each narrative to incorporate early career experiences, then focus on the initial boundary crossing process into cab driving work, before

moving on to any subsequent work experiences and future career plans. Each interview was therefore framed by asking the following three questions in turn:

1. What did you do after you left school?
2. How did you then get into cab driving work?
3. Do you plan to stay in your job?

The first question was broad enough to account for the possibility of having transitioned either directly into work after leaving school, or at any subsequent stage and prompted detailed accounts of early careers. I did not always need to ask the second question, as participants often went on spontaneously to explain the transition into cab driving and their experiences of working in the industry. The most difficult challenge as an interviewer was to decide at what point to pose the final question. The effect of this question was to move the interview into its final stage, effectively shutting down accounts of present-day work. However, I was always aware that participants might be called away suddenly on a job and had to ensure that I posed this final question in good enough time. At the end of each interview, I asked participants to think back over the interview and reconfirm their consent, before switching off the recorder. Across the sample group, interviews varied in length from 30 to 90 minutes, depending upon the time that each participant could spare from their work schedule.

5.3.3 Transcription

I transcribed my own interviews during the fieldwork process for two reasons. First, it provided a means of engaging directly with the empirical material and managing its conversion from spoken work to text (Etherington, 2004). Second, from an ethical perspective it gave me an opportunity to reflect further on the management of my role boundaries during the course of each interview. I undertook verbatim transcription, noting issues such as false starts, pauses, and laughter (Halcombe & Davidson, 2006). In completing the transcription process alongside undertaking the fieldwork, I also entered into the first stages of data analysis (Stuckey, 2014; Tessier, 2012). I viewed this transcription process as an early stage of familiarisation with the data, which forms an

important component of both template (King, 2020) and narrative analysis (Jossleson, 2007; Lieblich et al., 1998). Without being caught up in having to manage the moment-by-moment process of interviewing itself, I was able to concentrate on the details of each career narrative as I undertook the transcription process. I added any observations at this stage to my fieldwork journal, as a follow-up to the notes that I had written immediately after each interview.

5.4 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was used as a framework for organising and analysing data with a view to addressing the following two research questions [RQ]:

RQ1. Which career boundaries do cab drivers identify as salient in their career narratives?

RQ2. Why do cab drivers perceive these career boundaries as salient?

The use of thematic analysis has evolved as a means of identifying patterns in qualitative data sets. A key challenge for qualitative researchers can be how to make sense of rich and complex data gathered through in-depth interviews (Silverman, 2013). Thematic analysis has become established as a widely recognised method of sifting through data in a systematic way to identify recurring patterns or 'themes' (Carrera-Fernandez et al., 2014). As interest in thematic analysis has grown, a number of different approaches have evolved (Guest & MacQueen, 2012). These all have in common an iterative process of coding subsets of data as a means of identifying key themes (Cassell & Bishop, 2018). They can vary though in terms of whether, for example, *a priori* codes are established from the outset, or evolve in a more inductive fashion through the course of the analysis (Brooks et al., 2015).

Two key forms of contemporary thematic analysis were considered for the purpose of this thesis: King's (1998; 2012; 2020) template analysis versus Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis method. The reason for

focusing on these two approaches was that they have become well-established analytic methods offering clearly defined, systematic and widely recognised forms of thematic analysis (Cassell & Bishop, 2018). Of these two methods, I opted for template analysis on the basis of three key distinctions that have been identified by Brooks et al. (2015). First, template analysis offers scope for establishing *a priori* themes. This was useful because the nature of Research Questions 1 and 2 meant that it had been established beforehand that key 'themes' would take the form of different types of career boundaries. Second, the initial phase of local research interviews offered an identifiable and manageable subset of data for developing an initial coding template, whereas all data is coded from the outset in the Braun and Clark (2006) method. Finally, template analysis offered greater flexibility in terms of developing the coding frame as it allows for the development of more detailed and rich coding hierarchies than are typical of Braun and Clarke's (2006) method.

Employing template analysis then required working through the prescribed data analysis stages (King, 1998; 2012; 2020). This began with establishing *a priori* codes, which were then applied to a subset of the interviews and developed to build an initial coding frame. This coding frame was then applied to the remaining data and modified where appropriate, so that the final template reflected key themes across the entire data set.

5.4.1 *A Priori* Themes

A short list of *a priori* themes were drawn up for the purpose of this study (King, 1998; 2012; 2020), based upon the potentially salient career boundaries associated directly with cab driving that were identified in Chapter 4 (Figure 4.1). These included the occupation boundary that individuals cross as they transition into the cab driving, as well as other boundaries that they might encounter during the course of their day-to-day work. As a starting point the following *a priori* themes were identified, based upon career boundary type:

- Occupation Boundary
- Organisation Boundary
- Job Boundary
- Geographic Boundary
- Work/Non-work Boundary

Identifying *a priori* themes offered a useful starting point for building an initial coding template. Taking this approach proved useful in the early stages of the data analysis, helping me to remain on the right side of the 'fine line between being immersed in the data and drowning in it' (Seers, 2011). At the same time, I was aware of the need to remain vigilant to the possibility that not all of these career boundaries might prove relevant, or that others might be identified as salient as the analysis unfolded (King, 1998; 2012; 2020).

5.4.2 Initial Coding Template

The development of the initial coding template was based upon the first seven interviews undertaken with cab drivers in my home locality. This offered a manageable subset of data to begin assessing the relevance of *a priori* themes, as well as to begin developing more detailed hierarchical coding. The first stage of the process involved familiarisation with the transcripts associated with these interviews. I began by reading each transcript through and marking up by hand the types of career boundary that were mentioned. For example, if a participant talked about any aspect of transitioning into cab driving, this was coded as 'Occupation Boundary.' This included any reference to what triggered taking up cab driving, their experiences of becoming licensed as a cab driver, how they found out about their first cab driving work role and how long these processes took. Additionally, I identified other noteworthy issues, such as the many different types of job boundaries that cab drivers talked about. The aim here was to begin to gain a sense of the salient career boundaries and how these compared to the *a priori* list.

I then used NVivo computer software to assist with developing the initial coding template in a more systematic fashion. I identified and coded relevant sections

of each transcript according to the type of boundary that was being referred to, such as the Occupation Boundary or the Cab Driving Work/Life Boundary. This involved only selecting and coding those portions of the transcript that related to career boundary issues. This process resulted in the *a priori* themes all being maintained in the initial template, but two additional high-level themes were added - 'Customer Relational Boundary' and 'Ethical Boundaries.' Once I had identified the full range of career boundaries referred to in the transcripts, I went on to categorise and code the different ways in which each boundary was constructed as salient. For example, participants talked about the role of the occupation boundary as a status threshold, but they also talked about how perceptions of occupation boundary permeability impacted upon their transition into cab driving work. The initial coding template that was achieved in this way is shown in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 Initial Coding Template

1.0 Occupation Boundary
- 1.1 Multifaceted Boundary
- 1.2 Boundary Permeability
- 1.3 Status Threshold

2.0 Job Boundary
- 2.1 Demarcation of Job Type
- 2.2 Boundary Durability
- 2.3 Status Threshold

3.0 Organisation Boundary
- 3.1 Demarcation of Organisation Type
- 3.2 Boundary Durability
- 3.3 Status Threshold

4.0 Cab Driving Work/Life
- 4.1. Boundary Management
- 4.2. Contractual Boundary

5.0 Geographic Boundary

6.0 Customer Relational Boundary
- 6.1 Boundary Management
- 6.2 Recrafting the Boundary

7.0 Ethical Boundary
- 7.1 Boundary Management

5.4.3 Modifying the Coding Template

The next stage of analysis involved 'an iterative process of applying, modifying and re-applying the initial template' to the main data set (King, 2012, p. 430). This included confirming the relative salience of different career boundary types, as well as identifying varied roles that cab drivers perceived each boundary to play. Once all coding was completed, three key revisions were made to the higher order themes as follows:

- First, the 'Customer Relational Boundary' and 'Ethical Boundary' themes were subsumed under a new 'Cab Driver/ Customer Boundary' theme - to reflect the fact that the relationship between participants and their customers was core to both.

- Second, the *a priori* 'Geographic Boundary' theme was dropped. This arose as a result of checking the extent to which key themes were prevalent, both within each transcript and across the data set. This process confirmed that all participants talked at some length about the occupation boundary and the key part it played in shaping their cab driving career, as well as job and organisation boundary issues. Mention was also made consistently across every narrative about the cab driver/customer boundary and the management of the cab driving work/life boundary. In contrast, very few participants made reference to geographic boundaries or any significant part played by them and this theme was therefore removed.

- Third, a higher order set of overarching themes was identified. The Occupation Boundary was maintained as one of these in its own right, because of the salience attributed to it across the data set. However, the Job and Organisation Boundaries were subsumed under a higher order theme as 'Intra-Occupation Boundaries,' arising from commonalities in the way these boundaries were perceived as salient once individuals were working in the trade. The Cab Driver/Customer and Cab Driving Work/Life Boundaries were similarly brought together under a higher

theme as ‘Personal Boundaries’ that individuals encountered and managed in their day-to-day cab driving work.

Finally, a set of ‘Constrain/Enable’ sub-coding was added to the template. This was concerned with identifying why individuals regarded each key property of a boundary as salient in the context of their career narrative. For example, boundary permeability was identified by participants as an important property of the occupation boundary. However, some interpreted this feature as a problematic constraint that restricted their access to a work role of choice. By way of contrast, others perceived this to be a relatively permeable boundary enabling ready access to much needed employment.

5.4.4 Final Coding Template

The template analysis provided a valuable framework for ordering and analysing the data to address the first two research questions. The higher-level order categories identified for the final template are summarised here and detailed in Figure 5.3:

- Occupation Boundary
- Intra-Occupation Boundary
    - Job Boundary
    - Organisation Boundary
- Personal Boundary
    - Cab Driver/Customer Boundary
    - Cab Driving Work/Life Boundary

At the highest level, cab drivers identified three key types of career boundary in their career narratives: the occupation boundary, intra-occupation boundaries and personal boundaries. Two intra-occupation boundaries proved salient once individuals had crossed the occupation boundary and began working in the trade: the job and organisation boundary. Furthermore, two types of personal boundaries were interpreted as important in the context of cab drivers day-to-day work: the cab driver/customer boundary and the cab driving work/life

boundary. Within the context of each boundary type, another level of coding then categorised in more detail the particular boundary processes perceived by cab drivers as salient, associated with issues such as permeability, durability and flexibility. Finally, a further level of coding addressed why each of these boundary processes were interpreted as salient in terms of constraining/enabling the construction of their career.

5.5 Narrative Analysis

The second stage of data analysis used a form of plotline analysis to address the third research question [RQ]:

RQ3. What type of career narrative do cab drivers construct about their career boundary experiences?

The aim of this second stage of analysis was to identify individual types of career narrative plotline form, before going on to compare and contrast these across the data set to see if any characteristic types could be identified (Lieblich et al., 1998). Narrative plotlines describe the shape of the story arc across the beginning, middle and end of a narrative (Riessman, 2010). The process of constructing a plotline is called emplotment and involves setting key events into a chronological order, as well as evaluating how they impact upon the shape of the plotline (Gergen & Gergen, 1984). A form of data analysis was therefore required that could examine how key career boundary experiences shaped the plotline form as a cab driving career narrative unfolded.

Figure 5.3 Final Coding Template

1.0 Occupation Boundary
- 1.1 Multifaceted Boundary
- 1.2 Boundary Permeability
- 1.3 Status Threshold
  - 1.1.1 - 1.3.1 Constrain vs Enable

2.0 Intra-Occupation Boundary

2.1 Job Boundary
- 2.1.1. Demarcation of Job Type
- 2.1.2. Boundary Durability
- 2.1.3. Status Threshold
  - 2.1.1.1 - 2.1.3.1 Constrain vs Enable

2.2 Organisation Boundary
- 2.2.1. Demarcation of Organisation Type
- 2.2.2. Boundary Durability
- 2.2.3. Status Threshold
  - 2.2.1.1 - 2.2.3.1 Constrain vs Enable

3.0 Personal Boundary

3.1 Cab Driver/Customer Boundary
- 3.1.1. Boundary Management
- 3.1.2. Recrafting the Boundary
  - 3.1.1.1 - 3.1.2.1 Constrain vs Enable

3.2 Cab Driving Work/Life Boundary
- 3.2.1. Boundary Management
- 3.2.2. Contractual Boundary
  - 3.2.1.1 - 3.2.2.1 Constrain vs Enable

5.5.1 Interpreting Narrative Plotlines

A small number of studies have sought to interpret and sketch out narrative plotlines, based upon Gergen and Gergen's (1984) narrative framework. As Chapter 3 identified, that framework identifies three key types of narrative form: progressive, regressive and stable (Figure 3.1). A progressive plotline involves a narrative culminating in a positive outcome, whilst a regressive plotline involves a decline to a negative outcome. In a third form, the plotline remains stable, unfolding in a positive or negative steady state.

In practice, the plotline within a single narrative may shift between progressive, regressive and stable forms as an account unfolds. For example, a plotline might progress initially if an individual is working in an occupation of choice, but then go on to regress if they are made redundant and feel they have no option but to cross the occupation boundary into cab driving work. Alternatively, a plotline might regress at the outset if someone is unhappy in their current work role, but then progress if they cross the occupation boundary into cab driving and enjoy this new role. A graphical line can then be mapped out, which represents the overall plotline form that is constructed across each narrative. These simple, stylistic graphical representations can then be used as the basis for identifying characteristic types of narrative (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2011; Lieblich et al., 1998; Young et al., 1994).

5.5.2 Classifying Narrative Plotlines

Whilst studies such as those identified above have employed plotline analysis, there are no widely agreed or systematic guidelines for using this approach. In their study of parental influence in career development, Young et al. (1994) used a chronological sequencing approach based upon work by Alexander (1988). This examined the unfolding of the introduction, outcome and effect of a critical incident. In examining the career/life stories of Jews in Israel, Lieblich et al. (1998, p. 91) suggest that plot dynamics 'may be inferred from particular forms of speech' that identify evaluative phenomena such as key turning points, or how individuals feel about a particular stage of their life. The approach I had

employed in a study of teachers' career experiences involved summarising work histories and then mapping out key plotline turning points in those accounts (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2011). This included using reflexivity to note my own emotional responses to hearing a participant's career narrative and whether these were indicative of a regressive or progressive plotline. However, in this thesis I drew on key elements of all three of these prior studies in order to develop a more systematic set of procedures for identifying key forms of plotline. This approach involved tabulating chronological and evaluative data, as well as drawing on researcher reflexivity material. An iterative process of moving between these three sources was then employed as a means of identifying and classifying types of narrative plotline as follows:

5.5.2.1 Chronological Order

I began the narrative plotline analysis by drawing up a template comprised of five key chronological stages (Table 5.2). 'Past' events identified work experiences undertaken prior to cab driving. The table then identified the initial transition into cab driving, subsequent cab driving career experiences and the current work role. 'Future' plans concerned any career events that were anticipated in subsequent years. Data from each career narrative was added to this table. The process involved reading through a transcript, identifying key career events and their associated boundary experiences, then noting these in the data table in chronological order. The aim with this analysis was not to account for every detail of a cab driver's work history, but rather to establish the main features of career boundary chronology that had been selected for the purpose of the career narrative. For example, in summarising prior work experiences, an overview of any key occupations that a participant had worked in prior to crossing the occupation boundary into cab driving was noted.

This chronological table was valuable in informing the subsequent identification of narrative plotlines in two main ways. First, by reading the summaries of each narrative across the tables, it was possible to identify key turning points in the narrative, as participants recalled crossing the cab driving occupation boundary, for example, or a sequence of subsequent job role boundaries. This helped to

identify any shifts in plotline form at each stage of the narrative, as well as gain a sense of the overall shape of the plotline associated with any one account. Second, by reading down each column of the table, similarities and differences in how events unfolded over time could be compared across the data set. For example, by reading down the 'Transition to Cab Driving' column, it was possible to compare the reasons why individuals crossed the occupation boundary into cab driving work, as well as the career stage when this arose. In a similar way, reading down the final column 'Future Plans' made it possible to identify which participants wished to continue cab driving and those who wanted to leave this occupation. Tabulating the data in this way proved helpful in understanding how chronological features of career boundary experiences impacted upon the construction of different forms of plotline.

Table 5.2 Chronological Data Template

CHRONOLOGICAL DATA					
Driver Case Number	**Past Work Experiences**	**Transition to Cab Driving**	**Subsequent Cab Driving Roles**	**Current Role**	**Future Plans**
XX	*Prior to Crossing Occupation Boundary* Prior occupation(s) & key transitions	*Crossing Occupation Boundary* Age at transition Voluntary/ involuntary transition First cab driving role	*Intra-Occupation & Personal Boundaries* Key job/ organisation transitions Personal boundary experiences	*Current Career Boundary Experiences* Age at interview Current cab driving role Personal boundary experiences	*Future Career Boundary Experiences* Stay/leave cab driving Same/ different cab driving role

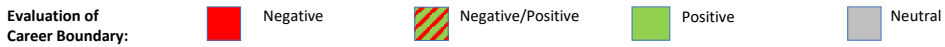
5.5.2.2 Evaluation

A second facet of the narrative plotline analysis involved collating and tabulating data about how career boundary experiences were evaluated across each career narrative. I read through the interview transcript data again, which had already been marked up for the thematic analysis by type of career boundary: occupation, job, organisation, cab driver/customer, cab driving work/life. The aim was to understand how a cab driver evaluated experiences associated with a particular type of boundary as they unfolded through the course of the career narrative and make a note of any illustrative text. This process was repeated for each of the five key career boundary types within a career narrative. I also noted any text that indicated the relative importance of a career boundary in relation to the others. The aim with this analysis was not to establish how every single career boundary event was evaluated, but rather an overall sense of how a career boundary was perceived across each narrative.

I used this material to tabulate and colour code how the cab drivers evaluated their career boundary experiences. For each participant, this involved drawing up a table of the five key boundaries, adding any relevant text data and colour-coding their evaluative experiences (Table 5.3). So, if the transcript data suggested that a cab driver felt negatively overall about a boundary constraining their career, it was coded in red. If they felt positively about it enabling their career then it was coded in green. If during the narrative their perceptions changed for some reason from positive to negative (or vice versa), then it was coded red/green. Finally, if the participant appeared relatively indifferent to the impact of a career boundary, it was left grey. This process offered a tabulated, colour-coded representation of each narrative, summarising how individuals felt about each of their five unfolding career boundary experiences.

Table 5.3 Evaluation Data Template

NARRATIVE / BOUNDARY	DRIVER CASE NUMBER XX
OCCUPATION	e.g. Negative Evaluation
JOB	e.g. Positive Evaluation
ORGANISATION	e.g. Neutral Evaluation
CAB DRIVER/CUSTOMER	e.g. Negative Evaluation
CAB DRIVING WORK/LIFE	e.g. Fluctuating Evaluation



5.5.2.3 Reflexivity

The third facet of analysis involved reflecting myself about how I felt listening to each narrative account. As Hoshmand (2005, p. 182) has suggested, ‘a story would not be a story if not for the effect that it has.’ I became aware of this from the outset of the fieldwork process, when some interviews were filled with laughter, whilst others touched on moments in the lives of participants that had caused them considerable stress, anger or unhappiness. I was left myself afterwards feeling emotions that varied from positive and uplifted, to worried and sometimes profoundly sad. In trying to make sense of the plotlines associated with each transcript, it was therefore informative to take account of my own personal response to them. In particular, it seemed likely that regressive plotlines would invoke negative emotions, whilst progressive plotlines would have the opposite effect. I therefore returned to my fieldwork journal to note any key emotions that I had documented shortly after each interview and during the transcription process.

5.5.2.4 Identifying and Classifying Plotlines

The final stage of the data analysis involved an iterative process of moving between the chronological tables, evaluative tables and reflexivity observations in order to identify key narrative plotline types. The colour-coding of the evaluative text data proved the most helpful starting point, as it offered a basis for beginning to group the narratives into three initial categories: regressive, progressive and cyclical narrative plotlines. Regressive narratives were identified broadly as those with all/primarily red coding that reflected predominantly problematic career boundary experiences. In a similar way, progressive narratives were characterised by all/primarily green coding as a result of evaluating career boundaries positively. In the cyclical narratives, individuals switched between perceiving multiple career boundaries negatively and positively, which prompted repeated moves back and forth across the cab driving occupation boundary.

Adding information from the chronological tables then helped to further subdivide the regressive, cyclical and progressive career narratives into more nuanced types. I found it helpful at this stage to sketch out simple plotlines for each of these three types and annotate them with additional chronological data. For example, I noted at what stage in their career narrative participants constructed the crossing of the occupation boundary into cab driving. Individuals also reported working as a cab driver for different lengths of time and, whilst some constructed accounts of positive embeddedness in the trade, others reported disliking cab driving work and some had left the occupation for periods of time. Noting such details on stylised plotline sketches proved helpful at this stage of the analysis, as a means of moving on to consider whether the regressive, cyclical and progressive plotline forms might be subdivided into more nuanced types.

By way of illustration, all of the cab drivers who constructed a regressive career narrative evaluated most key boundaries negatively as career constraints and wanted to leave the trade. However, whilst some felt trapped indefinitely within this occupation boundary, others had plans to leave within a year suggesting that their career narrative plotline might rise again in the future. These contrasting future plans contributed to the regressive narratives being split into either ‘Last Resort’ or ‘Fleeting’ types respectively. Within the progressive narratives, chronological data helped to identify individuals crossing the occupation boundary into cab driving at different career stages. For example, whilst some entered this occupation at an early stage and stayed (‘Lifelong’), others entered at a late career stage (‘Final’). In combination with the evaluative data, the chronological data was therefore helpful in splitting the career narratives into further different types.

I also drew on my reflexive notes to help confirm narrative plotline types. These proved useful reminders of my own personal response to the career narratives when I first heard them, as well as following the transcription process. In particular, the interviews that I had struggled with most in terms of researcher-practitioner role boundary management proved to be the regressive and cyclical career narratives. These often felt akin to the types of interview that I might encounter as a career counsellor and were therefore apt to trigger difficulties

with role boundary management, as well as linger in my mind afterwards as unfinished business. However, there were also times when my reflexive notes were useful in supporting a classification of a narrative as progressive, because of the positivity that they had instilled in me as a listener.

The final classification of eight different career narrative plotline types was the outcome of several iterative rounds of analysis; moving between the chronological tables, evaluation tables and my fieldwork journal notes. Further details of how each category was identified, their key characteristics and an illustration of a characteristic plotline are set out in Chapter 7 Narrative Analysis. In summary though, the eight types of career narrative that were identified are as follows:

- **Regressive Career Narratives**
    - 1. Last Resort
    - 2. Fleeting

- **Cyclical Career Narratives**
    - 3. Recurrent

- **Progressive Career Narratives**
    - 4. Means to an End
    - 5. Second Chance
    - 6. Salvation
    - 7. Final
    - 8. Lifelong

5.5.3 Writing-up the Results

I considered a number of options in terms of writing-up the results from the plotline analysis and classification process. One possibility was to provide a short summary analysis of every narrative, but this seemed impractical given the size of the data set. Another option was to construct composite narratives for each of the eight story types that had been identified. This approach has been proposed as a way of summarising the key characteristics and essence of groups of narratives (Creswell, 2007; Sonenshein, 2010; Taber, 2013). I did experiment with synthesising groups of stories in this way, but like Messias and DeJoseph (2004) I found this to be an unsatisfying approach. In particular, the nuance of individual career narratives became obscured, leaving a bland composite.

My solution for the purpose of this thesis is to present in Chapter 7 an overview of each of the eight story types and then illustrate each one by presenting an exemplar in some detail. I chose the accounts that stood out most clearly for me as characteristic of each career narrative type. The selected exemplars also represent a cross section of cab driver role, age, gender and ethnicity across the data set. Presenting an analysis of each story involved striking a balance between providing the original narrative in full, versus drawing out key chronological details and evaluative quotes from the transcript. As Squire et al. (2014, p. 102) suggest, ‘there are no prescriptive solutions to these communication problems.’ The analysis in Chapter 7 therefore represents a careful and considered attempt to provide data to illustrate the essence of individual accounts, but at the same time represents my own interpretation of the narratives that participants told.

5.6 Conclusion

The research design draws upon established research methods, ethical frameworks, reflexivity approaches and quality criteria. Additionally, it has been shaped by my own personal experiences and methods of working as a career counselling practitioner. I also wanted to actively engage in developing an

‘ethical attitude’ (Josselson, 2007, p. 537), by staying alert to the tensions that can arise in undertaking qualitative research and setting in place practical ways of addressing them. This has included giving time to understanding researcher-practitioner role boundary issues and integrating a counselling supervision process into the research design. This chapter has then provided a detailed account of the realities of undertaking the fieldwork, building a sample group and analysing the data. The aim has been to offer a transparent account of the way in which the data has been collected and examined, as well as provide context for the presentation of the results in the two chapters that now follow.

CHAPTER 6 RESULTS: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the thematic analysis, which followed King's (1998; 2012; 2020) template analysis procedures. In doing so, it addresses two of the research questions [RQ] that underpin this study:

RQ1. Which career boundaries do cab drivers identify as salient in their career narratives?
RQ2. Why do cab drivers perceive these career boundaries as salient?

The key findings associated with these questions are summarised in Table 6.1. Whilst a variety of cab driving career boundaries were identified previously in Chapter 4 which examined the research context, RQ1 sought to understand which types of career boundaries cab drivers themselves selected as salient in constructing their career narrative. The thematic analysis identified three key types of boundary that all participants perceived as important. The first was the occupation boundary, which the participants crossed as they transitioned into cab driving work. The second were intra-occupation boundaries (job, organisation) that they subsequently crossed or remained within as their cab driving work experiences unfolded. The third were personal boundaries (cab driver/customer; cab driving work/life) which were perceived as salient in the context of participant's daily cab driving work. However, across the data set cab drivers also identified a range of more nuanced boundary issues as personally significant. For example, the multifaceted nature of the occupation boundary, perceptions of its permeability and its role as a status threshold were identified as important facets of this boundary. Multiple salient boundaries and associated boundary issues were therefore highlighted through this analysis.

Additionally, the thematic analysis associated with RQ2 identified that cab drivers perceived career boundaries as salient for many different reasons (Table 6.1). For example, some cab drivers perceived the occupation boundary to be salient as a status threshold. On the one hand, crossing it was interpreted as a career demotion from a prior high-status role. On the other hand, it was construed by others as career advancement as a result of transitioning from what they perceived as an even lower status occupation. This analysis therefore highlighted markedly different ways in which individuals perceived key boundaries as important in constraining or enabling their career.

This chapter now goes on to examine these results in more detail. It is divided into three sections that address each of the key types of boundaries in turn: occupation boundary, intra-occupation boundaries and personal boundaries. These sections set out the results for Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 in the context of each type of boundary, illustrated with extracts from across the data set.

6.2 Occupation Boundary

The occupation boundary associated with cab driving work was identified in Chapter 4 as a long-standing and widely acknowledged phenomenon, with the potential to be perceived as salient by those transitioning into and working in the industry. This was borne out by the thematic analysis, which identified three issues associated with this boundary that were interpreted by cab drivers as important (Table 6.2). First, the occupation boundary was experienced as a complex phenomenon, comprised of multiple pathways into cab driving work. Second, whilst every participant crossed this occupation boundary to take up cab driving work, individual perceptions of boundary permeability differed. Third, the boundary was interpreted as a critical status threshold in the context of inter-occupation transitions. In each case, participants interpreted the occupation boundary variously as constraining or enabling their career in very different ways and their experiences are examined here.

Table 6.1 Summary of Template Analysis

BOUNDARY	ISSUE	CONSTRAIN CAREER	ENABLE CAREER
1. OCCUPATION BOUNDARY			
OCCUPATION	i. Multifaceted Boundary	Confusing array of boundary crossing routes	Useful choice of boundary crossing routes
	ii. Boundary Permeability	Barrier to accessing preferred driving role	Ready access to preferred cab driving role
	iii. Status Threshold	Demotion into low status occupation	Hierarchical advancement into a profession
2. INTRA-OCCUPATION BOUNDARY			
JOB	i. Demarcation of Job Type	Job of last resort	Specialist job of choice
	ii. Boundary Durability	Job boundaries under threat	Stable job boundaries
	iii. Status Threshold	Perceptions of a low status job	Hierarchical job pathways
ORGANISATION	i. Demarcation of Organisation	Organisation of last resort	Organisation of choice
	ii. Boundary Durability	Organisation boundaries under threat	Stable organisation boundaries
	iii. Status Threshold	Perceptions of a low status organisation	Hierarchical organisation pathways
3. PERSONAL BOUNDARY			
CAB DRIVER/ CUSTOMER	i. Boundary Management	Boundary violation	Building positive rapport
	ii. Recrafting the Boundary	Limits to customisation	Customising boundary of choice
CAB DRIVING WORK/LIFE	i. Boundary Management	Pressure to work all hours	Flexible boundary enabling work/life balance
	ii. Negotiating Contractual Boundary	Limited contractual rights	Useful cash income

Table 6.2 Occupation Boundary

ISSUE	CONSTRAIN CAREER	ENABLE CAREER
i. Multifaceted Boundary Variety of driver, car, organisation licenses & shift options reflected in multiple boundary crossing routes	**Confusing array of boundary crossing routes** Unaware of full range of route options: *I could have got an operator's license straightaway, but I didn't know about it. I could have done exactly what I wanted to do straightaway instead of working for someone else first (03)*	**Useful choice of boundary crossing routes** Select route best suited to achieving personal career goals e.g. quickest route to access much needed work: *You put your license in, you paid your money, the council officer says you can drive and that's it… you've got it (09)*
ii. Boundary Permeability All participants crossed this boundary, but varied perceptions of permeability	**Barrier to accessing preferred cab driving role** Route options limited by time, money, social networks: *I went and did the Knowledge for the yellow badge, which is the suburban driver. So that took two years and I done that because it was a shorter time than the green badge (12)* Increasing boundary codification: *It's got a lot more intense now. I'm not saying you can't get a badge if you want, but you've got to be prepared to work at it (20)*	**Ready access to preferred cab driving role** Choice of route options available, dependent upon e.g. money for licensing/vehicle: *Because of the redundancy money I thought "I'm going to buy me own car, have what I want"'(03)* e.g. social networks assist with boundary crossing: *Mostly…. my cousin really he sorted it all out. All the paperwork, he knew what to do. I just did what he said, signed where he said sign! It was a few weeks, but it was all done, no problem. (32)*
iii. Status Threshold Crossing the occupation boundary perceived as change in status, relative to prior occupation	**Demotion into low status occupation** Boundary crossing interpreted as step down in status, compared with prior occupation: *With the cab driving, it is… there is no respect, you are not thought of well (30).*	**Hierarchical advancement into a profession** Boundary crossing interpreted as career advancement & positive professional identity, relative to prior occupation: *It's a specialist job, you need to be specially trained (01)*

6.2.1 Multifaceted Occupation Boundary

Across the career narratives, there was evidence to support Gunz's (2007, p. 477) notion of the occupation boundary as 'multifaceted, in the sense that it marks the transition into many different kinds of roles.' Participants described crossing this boundary initially from a wide variety of skilled and low-skilled occupations to take up cab driving work (Table 6.3). Half of the sample group commenced as minicab drivers, but others started as taxi drivers and a small number trained from the outset as black cab drivers. Nearly all participants rented a vehicle initially and two-thirds of the group were contracted on a full-time basis. All participants worked for an established cab firm initially, rather than setting up their own company. Collectively, the narratives therefore identified an occupation boundary comprised of multiple routes into an array of different cab driving roles. In taking-up work as a minicab driver, for example, Driver 28 rented a vehicle and undertook part-time hours. However, Driver 31 became licensed as a full-time minicab driver and purchased his own vehicle. Far from being a simple phenomenon, participant's transition experiences highlighted having to identify a suitable pathway from a range that comprise this occupation boundary.

In terms of constraining their career, the complexities of this boundary were confusing for some as they attempted to navigate across it. The multiplicity of licensing arrangements, as well as the availability of different shift patterns, sometimes proved bewildering. Even after investigating licensing processes, some participants remained unaware of the full range of options available to those entering the industry for the first time:

> *When I first started I didn't know what a commission driver was, compared to an owner driver (22).*
>
> *I could have got an operator's license straightaway, but I didn't know about it. I could have done exactly what I wanted to do straightaway instead of working for someone else first (03).*

Table 6.3 Initial Occupation Boundary Crossing

No.	Entry Age	M/F	Ethnicity	Prior occupation	Initial cab driving role - driver Licence - rent or own Vehicle - full/part time
01	20-24	M	White	Bowling Alley Assistant	Minicab Rent FT
02	25-29	M	White	Retail Manager	Taxi Rent PT
03	45-49	M	White	Farm Manager	Minicab Owner FT
04	45-49	M	White	Lorry Driver	Minicab Rent FT
05	25-29	M	White	Retail Manager	Minicab Rent FT
06	20-24	M	White	Aircraft Mechanic	Taxi Rent FT
07	25-29	M	White	Swimming Lifeguard	Taxi Rent FT
08	20-24	M	White	Factory Worker	Minicab Rent FT
09	20-24	M	White	Garage Mechanic	Minicab Rent FT
10	30-34	M	White	Recruitment Consultant	Minicab Rent PT
11	45-49	F	White	Care Worker	Minicab Rent FT
12	35-39	M	White	Printer/Manager	Minicab Rent PT
13	30-34	F	White	Bank Clerk	Black Cab (Y) Rent PT
14	20-24	M	White	Vehicle Parts Sales	Black Cab (G) Rent FT
15	20-24	M	White	Building Labourer	Minicab Rent FT
16	50-54	M	White	Police Officer	Black Cab (G) Owner PT
17	50-54	F	White	Hairdresser/Manager	Taxi Rent PT
18	30-34	M	White	Roofer	Taxi Rent FT
19	55-60	M	White	Sales Manager	Taxi Rent FT
20	35-40	M	White	Plumber	Taxi Rent FT
21	25-29	M	White	Print Clerk	Taxi Rent FT
22	35-39	M	White	Fast Food Assistant	Taxi Owner FT
23	35-40	M	White	Property Development	Taxi Rent PT
24	45-49	M	White	Finance Manager	Taxi Owner PT
25	50-54	M	White	Lorry Driver	Taxi Rent FT
26	55-59	M	White	IT Consultant	Taxi Rent PT
27	25-29	M	BAME	Cash & Carry Sales	Minicab Rent FT
28	20-24	M	BAME	University Student	Minicab Rent PT
29	35-39	M	BAME	Railway Manager	Minicab Rent PT
30	50-54	M	BAME	Baker	Minicab Rent FT
31	50-54	M	White	Courier	Minicab Owner FT
32	40-44	M	BAME	Waiter/Bar Worker	Minicab Rent FT

Even when individuals thought they had identified a preferred route, the intricacies of the licensing processes offered up unforeseen boundary crossing routes. For example, whilst many had heard beforehand about the need to undertake 'The Knowledge' in order to become a black cab driver, few had appreciated the distinction between yellow and green badge licensing until they investigated entering this work further. Trying to identify and understand the various routes across the occupation boundary was therefore sometimes problematic.

However, for others this multifaceted boundary offered the possibility of selecting a boundary crossing route best suited to the construction of their career. For example, some of those in need of ready access to work appreciated the relative speed and simplicity of becoming licensed as a minicab driver and contracting as a commission driver with an existing cab firm:

> *You put your license in, you paid your money, the council officer says you can drive and that's it… you've got it (09).*

Alternatively, others opted from the outset to become taxi or black cab drivers, purchase their own cab vehicle and select preferred working hours. For some, this complex boundary was therefore interpreted as offering a helpful choice of routes, which enabled them to access preferred work.

6.2.2 Occupation Boundary Permeability

Whilst low-skilled occupation boundaries have typically been considered easy to cross, the thematic analysis showed that individuals interpreted occupation boundary permeability in very different ways. On the one hand, it was perceived as a barrier preventing access to some preferred roles. The time and money required to train as a black cab driver (green badge) deterred many from pursuing this option initially, even if they felt it had the best earning potential. Instead, two participants trained from the outset as black cab drivers (yellow badge), on the basis that they could complete this more quickly:

I went and did The Knowledge for the yellow badge, which is the suburban driver. So that took two years and I done that because it was a shorter time than the green badge (12).

The remainder of the sample group became licensed as either taxi drivers outside London or minicab drivers, but some perceived that even these route options were restricted in some way. For example, the higher fees associated with becoming a taxi driver, along with having to take a local knowledge test, meant that some felt they had to become licensed as a minicab driver instead. The cost of licensing a vehicle was also identified as limiting occupation boundary crossing options:

If you pay the car licence and road test on your own vehicle you're looking at about £500 quid straight off, which not many people have got (01).

As a result, some were unable to afford to licence their own car and felt that they had no choice other than to rent a vehicle from a cab firm in the first instance.

Many participants highlighted the increasing codification of the occupation boundary over time and its potential to restrict access to the industry. Some noted the increasing licensing regulations introduced since 1976, when previously it had not even been necessary to licence a minicab vehicle:

You could use anything… back then in minicabs. And now it's all regulated (02).

Others reported the introduction of more challenging taxi knowledge tests in recent years, which they felt were being imposed as a means of capping cab driver numbers. They reported struggling to pass these more demanding tests and knew of others who had failed, raising concern about contemporary access to cab driving work:

It's got a lot more intense now. I'm not saying you can't get a badge if you want, but you've got to be prepared to work at it (20).

The impact of national and local licensing changes over time then raised concern for some participants about traditionally permeable boundary crossing

routes being rendered impassable. Consequently, they were wary of leaving this occupation temporarily, because they were anxious that it might not be possible to become relicensed subsequently if they wished to return.

On the other hand, some of the sample group perceived the occupation boundary as a usefully permeable one. This arose when individuals had sufficient time and financial resources to select a boundary crossing route of choice. For example, some took advantage of flexible training schemes to complete The Knowledge whilst still employed in another occupation. Others had funds available to purchase a vehicle of choice:

> *Because of the redundancy money I thought "I'm going to buy me own car, have what I want" (03).*

Social networks were also highlighted as an important factor underpinning perceptions of occupation boundary permeability. For example, the initial idea of taking-up cab driving was often prompted by family and friends who were already working in the industry. This included one participant who was encouraged by an extensive family network to train as a black cab driver, following a childcare break from a bank clerk role:

> *Everybody's in this black cab industry. My sister, my husband, my three brother-in-laws, my husband's cousin and his two sons (13).*

Advice and support also took the form of providing introductions to potential employers, or even directly offering participants their first cab driving job. As a result, many knew from the outset that they were guaranteed cab driving work once they had obtained the appropriate licensing. Family and friends were also often instrumental in providing help with negotiating through the licensing processes:

> *Mostly…. my cousin really he sorted it all out. All the paperwork, he knew what to do. I just did what he said, signed where he said sign! It was a few weeks, but it was all done, no problem (32).*

In addition to having sufficient time and funds, social networks therefore also played a crucial part in both initiating and supporting the occupation boundary crossing into cab driving work.

6.2.3 Occupation Boundary as a Status Threshold

As earlier chapters of this thesis have highlighted, the occupation boundary that demarcates cab driving has differentiated it typically as not only low-skilled but also low status work. Certainly, there was evidence in some narratives that individuals themselves perceived crossing the boundary into cab driving as a transition into a low status occupation. For example, some were acutely conscious that this occupation was held in poor regard by others:

> *With the cab driving, it is… there is no respect, you are not thought of well (30).*

This situation was compounded in cases where an individual had made an enforced inter-occupation transition from what they perceived as a higher status occupation into cab driving work. By way of illustration, one participant was made redundant from his prior job as a retail manager and struggled to find other work at a similar managerial level. Disheartened and in urgent need of income to support his family, he finally followed a friend's advice to take up cab driving work instead, an outcome which he regarded as a substantive career demotion that was '*sort of forced on me' (05).*

In contrast though, others interpreted crossing the occupation boundary into cab driving as a means of advancing into a skilled profession. For them, the occupation boundary differentiated cab driving from the everyday task of driving undertaken by the general population, because it required enhanced driving skills in order to convey customers to their destination successfully:

> *It's a specialist job, you need to be specially trained (01).*
>
> *Your life is in the cab driver's hands. You're trusting them to get you there on time. And you're trusting them to drive safely (15).*

As a result, several participants described themselves as *'professional drivers.*' Perhaps unsurprisingly this included some black cab drivers who had spent years completing The Knowledge. However, some minicab and taxi drivers also regarded the process of obtaining their cab driving license as a form of professional accreditation and expressed considerable pride in holding a cab driving license. In these instances, the occupation boundary was interpreted as

an important status threshold circumscribing not simply an occupation, but a skilled profession.

6.2.4 Summary

This analysis has identified the salience that cab drivers attributed to the occupation boundary associated with cab driving work, as well as the different ways in which it can be perceived as constraining or enabling the construction of a career. Collectively the narratives identified a complex boundary, comprised of an array of different routes into cab driving roles. Whilst for some this proved confusing and made the boundary difficult to navigate across, for others it represented a choice of pathways and the option to select the one best to suit their personal needs. However, only those with sufficient time, funds and social networks were able to select their preferred routes. Furthermore, prior work history played a part in determining whether crossing this particular boundary was interpreted as a career demotion, or the attainment of a professional occupation status.

6.3 Intra-Occupation Boundaries

This section presents the findings from the analysis of two intra-occupational boundaries that were interpreted as salient: the job and organisation boundaries. These were boundaries that cab drivers either remained within, or went on to cross, after the initial transition into this occupation. They were interpreted across the narratives as important in three different capacities. First, these boundaries both played a critical part in demarcating an unexpected array of job and organisation types. Second, whilst some of these boundaries were perceived as longstanding, there was also evidence of boundaries evolving and disappearing with consequences for career mobility and embeddedness. Third, the array of different job and organisation boundaries were interpreted by some as status thresholds structuring hierarchical career pathways within the industry. In each case, participants interpreted job and organisation boundaries as

constraining or enabling the construction of a career and their experiences are explored here.

6.3.1 Job Boundary

The job boundary associated with cab driving work was identified in Chapter 4 as having the potential to be salient, on the basis of well-established distinctions made between the different types of cab driver license. However, the thematic analysis identified a far more complex situation, in which the job boundary was perceived by cab drivers themselves as salient for many different reasons (Table 6.4). These include the demarcation of job type, job boundary durability and the job boundary as a status threshold, which are considered here in turn.

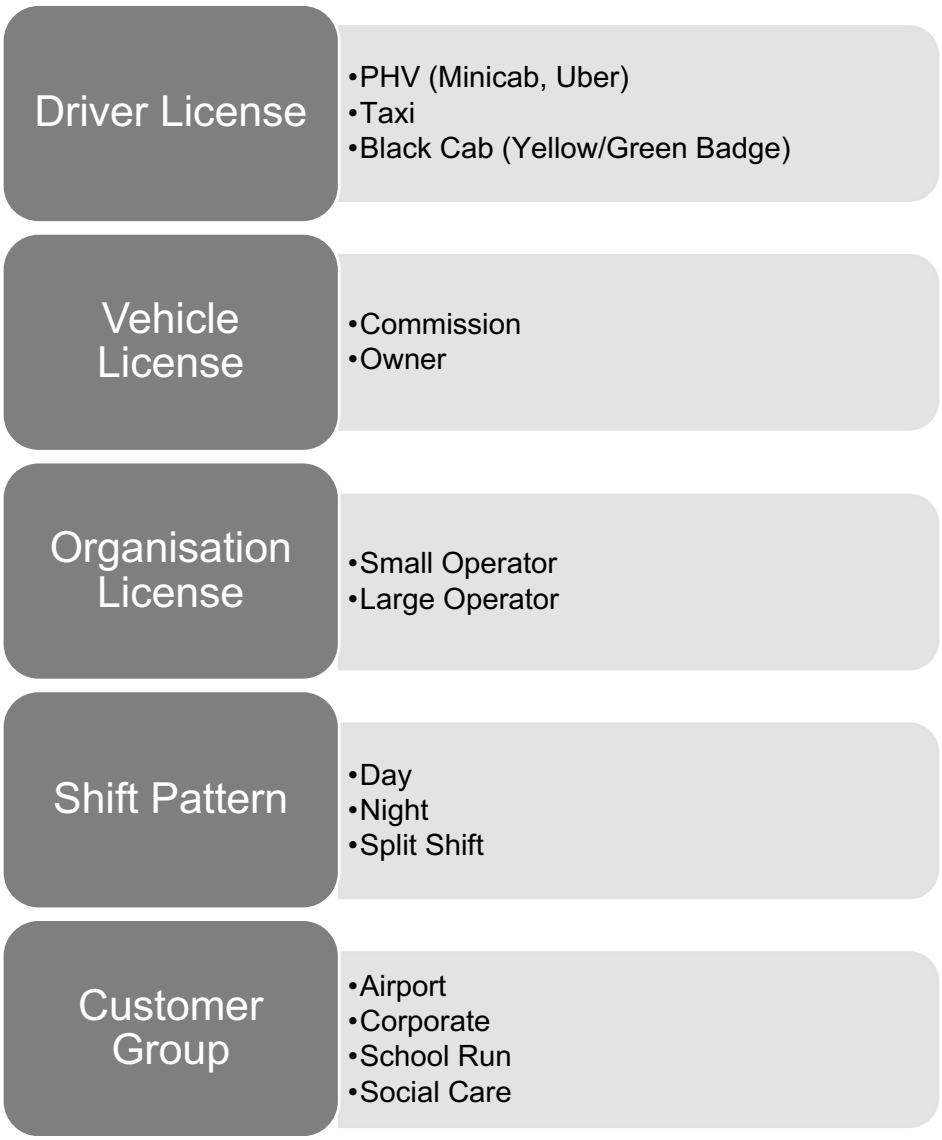
6.3.1.1 Demarcation of Job Type

Whilst a number of different job boundaries were identified in Chapter 4 based upon driver licensing distinctions - minicab, taxi (outside London) and black cab (London only) - the thematic analysis highlighted an understanding by cab drivers and employers of a far more extensive array of subtle, nuanced boundaries within the industry itself. These included job boundaries differentiating roles associated with vehicle licensing, shift patterns and types of customers (Figure 6.1), which only became apparent after individuals began working as a cab driver. This complex range of job boundaries was then perceived as constraining or enabling vocational choice. Whilst for some a particular job boundary was interpreted as demarcating work of last resort, for others the array of job types offered an opportunity to specialise in a cab driving job of choice.

Table 6.4 Job Boundary

ISSUE	CONSTRAIN CAREER	ENABLE CAREER
i. Demarcation of Job Type Array of job types based on licensing, shifts & customer type	**Job of last resort** Dislike key features of the job role e.g. license type *I weren't so keen on minicabbing 'cos it… you weren't so free as you are with the taxi (08)* e.g. customer type *I'm not cut out for the little old biddies and their shopping… it's just not me (02)*	**Specialist job of choice** Enjoy key features of the job e.g. shift pattern *I prefer the days. Finish and get home, all done then (18)* e.g. customer type *I like taking the old people. They're interesting, they're nice, they're easy to get along with. Most of them need loads of help and they haven't got anybody else to help them (22)*
ii. Boundary Durability Variation in boundary durability, from those under threat to well established boundaries	**Job boundaries under threat** Emergence of contemporary app-based companies threatening traditional job types: *It means anyone can get licensed, get the [company name] app on his phone … and he just sits there ready and waiting.' (14)*	**Stable job boundaries** Durable job boundaries (traditional or new) offer opportunities to become positively embedded in stable work: *This technology… you know it can be good for jobs… the Uber jobs have been good for anybody like me looking for settled work (10)*
iii. Status Threshold Subtle, nuanced job boundaries perceived as status thresholds	**Perceptions of a low status job** Particular job types interpreted as relatively low status: *Minicabbing… let's face it… it's hardly what you'd call a good job is it? (27)*	**Hierarchical job pathways** Crossing a particular series of job boundaries interpreted as career advancement: *When I got my green badge, that was my Mount Everest. Absolutely… my Mount Everest! (15)*

Figure 6.1 Job Type



From a licensing perspective, there were examples across the sample group of minicab, taxi and black cab drivers who either disliked or enjoyed key features of that particular job role. For example, one participant who had worked as a minicab driver felt the role offered few opportunities to work autonomously and therefore transitioned into taxi driving. However, another regarded minicab work positively as an opportunity to meet different types of customers and therefore had no plans to leave his job:

> *I weren't so keen on minicabbing 'cos it… you weren't so free as you are with the taxi (08).*

Minicabbing… well people say it is not a good job, I know people say that. But I think it is right for some people, it is right for me… I like the variety (32).

Additionally, strong preferences were expressed by some cab drivers regarding their choice of vehicle license status:

I'm a company driver, you know? I like it 'cos I don't have to think about anything like taxi insurance, trade plates or anything like that (25).

I'm an owner driver, not a company driver… I like having my own car, not a rented a car (03).

For others, the varied shift patterns available with organisations across the industry provided opportunities to work preferred hours. In particular, a number of cab drivers differentiated bounded job roles based upon the widespread availability of night and day shifts:

Most companies - you either are a night driver, or a day driver (01).

Furthermore, whilst some individuals enjoyed daytime work, others actively sought out night shifts instead, as exemplified by these participants:

I prefer the days. Finish and get home, all done then (18).

I mainly do nights, mainly evenings and nights, because I'm more of a night person. It's empty roads, time on your own. And I don't mind a bit of me own company if you know what I mean. I read a lot, I read constantly, I never stop reading. So that suits me in the evenings as well. You can read while you're waiting (21).

These day and night shift patterns were also associated with specific types of customer. During the daytime, different groups that were identified included the elderly, schoolchildren, shoppers, commuters and tourists. In contrast, those on night shifts described working primarily with people out socialising at restaurants, pubs and clubs. Many participants then expressed a strong preference for working with a particular social group. For example, whilst some enjoyed engaging with elderly customers, for others this was not a group that they felt comfortable working with:

I like taking the old people. They're interesting, they're nice, they're easy to get along with. Most of them need loads of help and they haven't got anybody else to help them (22).

I'm not cut out for the little old biddies and their shopping… it's just not me (02).

In instances when participants had taken up a preferred job, they expressed great satisfaction with their work, became positively embedded in their role and expressed no inclination to make any further job transitions. Furthermore, they often referred to themselves spontaneously during their interviews as a particular type of cab driver - such as a 'day' driver, a 'commission' driver, or a 'social care' driver - suggesting that these roles formed an important and positive part of their cab driver identity.

6.3.1.2 Job Boundary Durability

There was evidence that the durability of the different types of job boundaries identified in Figure 6.1 was regarded as salient, because it had implications for both job embeddedness and mobility. On the one hand, concern was expressed by some minicab and black cab drivers that their job boundaries were under threat from contemporary companies using online platforms. In part this was about the ease with which potential competitors were perceived to be accessing the industry:

It means anyone can get licensed, get the [company name] app on his phone … and he just sits there ready and waiting (14).

There was also anxiety about the lower cost service that customers might expect, as well as the potential for new app technologies to raise expectations about response speeds from all types of cab firm:

Now people phone up with a few minutes to spare and expect the car there and then (02).

Furthermore, for black cab drivers there was an additional worry that their hard earned 'Knowledge' was being undermined by other minicab and taxi

competitors having vehicles fitted with GPS software: *They're all on a sat nav now (06).*

Concern was also expressed about the sustainability of existing job roles in the face of these various technical developments. This was particularly the case in London, where the rapid expansion of Uber was perceived to have potentially disastrous consequences for existing cab drivers and businesses:

> *It could actually ruin the cab trade in London… the new app technology (16).*

However, even beyond the UK capital, there was considerable anxiety that the nature and speed of technological developments were challenging long-established job boundaries, thereby threatening the career stability and livelihoods of many working in this occupation.

On the other hand, the longstanding nature of many of the job boundaries identified in Figure 6.1 meant that they were perceived by some as a stable framework in which to become positively embedded in a specialist job role, or cross a career boundary into a preferred one. Additionally, the emergence in the London area of a rapidly growing 'Uber' driver category was regarded by some as offering new opportunities for accessing cab driving:

> *This technology… you know it can be good for jobs… the Uber jobs have been good for anybody like me looking for settled work (10).*

The emergence of new technology and the rapid growth of online company platforms was therefore more likely to be perceived by relative newcomers as a positive development, whilst for those cab drivers who were more well-established in the industry it had the potential to be perceived as a considerable threat.

6.3.1.3 Job Boundary as a Status Threshold

Whilst earlier chapters highlighted that low-skilled work such as cab driving has been presumed to have a flat hierarchical structure, the thematic analysis identified a more complex situation. In particular, there was evidence that nuanced job boundaries could be perceived by cab drivers as status thresholds. As such, crossing a particular series of job boundaries was interpreted by some as a form of career advancement within the cab driving industry. These pathways were not acknowledged in the cab driving career materials examined in Chapter 4, nor was there any evidence that they were anticipated by the sample group prior to entering the industry. Instead, they became discernible once individuals had taken up cab driving and began to develop a better understanding of not only the variety of job boundaries, but also their associated status hierarchies.

Some drivers identified a hierarchical career pathway that involved crossing job boundaries based upon cab driver licencing. Whilst many in the sample group started out working initially as minicab drivers, some then went on to transition into taxi driving and perceived this as a transition into higher status work:

> *Minicabbing… let's face it… it's hardly what you'd call a good job is it? (27).*

> *There's more money in the taxis… and it's just a better quality job all round to be honest (08).*

Several participants also described moving on from working as a minicab driver, or taxi driver (outside London), to become a London black cab (yellow/green badge) driver. In these cases, participants had all undertaken The Knowledge alongside their existing cab driving job role, which was regarded as useful prior experience and a practical way of funding this boundary crossing process. For those who had gone on to complete the more substantive green badge training, it was invariably perceived as the pinnacle of their cab driving career, offering access to more highly paid work around central London:

> *When I got my green badge, that was my Mount Everest. Absolutely… my Mount Everest! (15).*

Others perceived a hierarchical pathway that involved entering the industry as a minicab, taxi or black cab driver transporting a variety of customers, but then specialising in work with a particular client group. This was achieved in one of two ways. Those running their own company selected preferred types of customer. Others working for smaller employers reported that they would be allocated work based on their known preference for engaging with a particular customer group. Whilst crossing a boundary into a more specialist job might then simply be perceived as accessing work of choice, for some it also represented a step-up in status due the nature of the client group. For example, one of the minicab drivers had specialised in recent years in airport work, which often involved transporting business customers. In keeping with this client group, he had adopted a formal dress code himself and maintained a spotlessly clean car, thereby differentiating himself from others in the sector:

> *I see some cab drivers and they've got jogging bottoms on, hoodies. And I'm thinking 'Oh, you know, unbelievable.' And their cars look filthy, you know? (04).*

Another pathway involved renting a car initially, but then subsequently purchasing a vehicle. Car ownership was regarded by some as an important status symbol within the industry, setting them apart from those renting a vehicle as this owner-driver asserted:

> *Because they drive and pay a rent for the car, they don't inspect that car and sometimes it'll be dirty inside (03).*

A further typical transition involved crossing the job boundary from night to day shifts. For some this move was triggered by having a young family and wishing to spend more time at home, or as a result of aging and struggling with night shifts. Beyond this though, crossing the boundary from a night to day cab driving job represented an improved status shift for some, by transitioning away from ferrying night customers who might be drunk and abusive, to transporting a better-behaved class of daytime customers.

6.3.1.4 Summary

This analysis identified the salience of a subtle and complex variety of job boundaries associated with cab driving work, often discernible only to those working within the industry. These boundaries were then interpreted as constraining or enabling cab driving careers in a variety of ways. In demarcating job roles, they delimited either work of last resort, or alternatively provided an opportunity to satisfy vocational preferences by specialising in a job of choice. Varied boundary durability also had implications for job embeddedness and mobility. Whilst longstanding job boundaries provided stable structural frameworks within which individuals could remain within or move between job roles as they saw fit, new technology was also perceived to threaten traditional job roles and therefore career stability. Finally, these intricate job boundaries were perceived by some as status thresholds, such that crossing them could be perceived as a form of hierarchical career advancement.

6.3.2 Organisation Boundary

The organisation boundary associated with cab driving work was similarly identified in Chapter 4 as having the potential to be perceived as salient, because of distinctions made between different types of cab driving companies. However, thematic analysis identified a far more complex situation, in which the organisation boundary was perceived by cab drivers themselves as salient for many different reasons (Table 6.5). These include the demarcation of occupation types, occupation boundary durability and the occupation boundary as a status threshold, which are considered here in turn.

Table 6.5 Organisation Boundary

ISSUE	CONSTRAIN CAREER	ENABLE CAREER
i. Demarcation of Organisation Type Array of organisation types based on size, structure, specialism	**Organisation of last resort** Dislike key features of the organisation e.g. pressure of running own company: *I'm always worrying about the work, the next job, not losing customers (11)* e.g. working for a large company: *It is an awful, awful way to work. Nobody knows your name, they just know what your call sign is. You never go in an office, you never see or talk to anyone (10)*	**Organisation of choice** Enjoy key features of the organisation e.g. autonomy of running own company: *I like working for myself, being my own boss. Nobody really tells me what to do, where to go (06)* e.g. working for a small company: *I'll go and sit on the rank sometimes and get something over the radio, but I can also come into the office and have a chat too. And I enjoy that you know, I really do (21)*
ii. Boundary Durability Variation in boundary durability, associated with anything from short-lived to long-standing cab driving firms	**Organisation boundaries under threat** Company closures e.g. struggling to run own firm: *I had three people working for me by that time and it was very hectic. My wife… nearly drove her crazy. And when I looked at it all, I wasn't making very much money out of it, so I gave that up and went to drive for a company (09)*	**Stable organisation boundaries** Durable organisation boundaries (traditional or new) offer opportunities to become positively embedded in an organisation: *I've never been anywhere ever since, never left. We've all got our own things and everybody sticks to that. Everybody's got there place here (22)*
iii. Status Threshold Subtle, nuanced job boundaries perceived as status thresholds	**Perceptions of a low status organisation** Particular organisations interpreted as relatively low status: *The old minicab firms, you see them looking pretty rundown… a bit unloved (27)*	**Hierarchical organisation pathways** Crossing a particular series of organisation boundaries interpreted as career advancement: *I've moved on and got my own show now (03)*

6.3.2.1 Demarcation of Organisation Types

Earlier chapters identified how boundaries can demarcate a variety of different sizes and types of cab driving organisations, which the analysis confirmed was perceived as salient by those working in the industry. Across the narratives, the sample group described experiences of crossing boundaries into organisations ranging in size from one-man bands to large corporations. Additionally, whilst some had worked with organisations where cab drivers connect up with customers via call handling offices, others contracted for work via the new technology software apps. On the one hand, individuals then perceived an organisation boundary as a constraint when it was perceived as demarcating a particular type of organisation that they disliked working for. On the other hand, for others the array of organisation types offered an opportunity to select and contract for work with a company of choice.

Several of the sample group had opted to set up their own cab firm after working in the industry for a period of time. However, the responsibility of running a cab driving business then proved challenging for some. Common difficulties included trying to cover the variety of different roles required as an owner-manager, which extended beyond cab driving itself to include scheduling work, employing staff and trying to maintain and build a customer base:

> *It's very stressful. It's a lot of juggling, trying to cover the various jobs and the different shifts sometimes (1).*
>
> *I'm always worrying about the work, the next job, not losing customers (11).*

In contrast though, some owner-managers preferred the autonomy of running their own business and being accountable only to themselves:

> *I like working for myself, being my own boss. Nobody really tells me what to do, where to go (06).*
>
> *I don't have to ask anyone for time off. I don't have to say 'Oh, I've only got three days left of my holiday this year.' I have as much holiday as I want. I know I just have to work hard beforehand to cover when I'm not working (02).*

Amongst those working for a large company, some highlighted a key benefit as the guarantee of a steady flow of work, without having to chase business themselves. However, others described considerable challenges associated with working for bigger cab firms. These included feeling under constant pressure to accept whatever customers were directed their way, as well as struggling with the faceless nature of their working relationship with an organisation:

> *It is an awful, awful way to work. Nobody knows your name, they just know what your call sign is. You never go in an office, you never see or talk to anyone. One of the most depressing times I've ever had, these three years (10).*

Others expressed a preference for working with a small company occupying a physically bounded and accessible local office base. Unlike those working for larger organisations and app technology companies, some individuals described building meaningful relationships with managers, call operators and other cab driving colleagues:

> *I usually do me school runs and then call in the office here about quarter past nine when I've finished, have a cup of tea and catch up. And once or twice the guv might call me. And I just fancied a sandwich now and I've got a Council vehicle test at two o'clock, so I've just dropped in for a while. (20).*

> *I'll go and sit on the rank sometimes and get something over the radio, but I can also come into the office and have a chat too. And I enjoy that you know, I really do (21).*

Finally, a number of the sample group highlighted how they enjoyed working in a family cab driving business. Some reported being happy to be employed by a company that had been established by a relative and were keen to emphasise this family connection. For example, one taxi driver was extremely proud to work for a relative who had arrived many years ago in the UK as an immigrant:

> *My uncle… an uncle on my mother's side… he set up this minicab company. That's his company, this company that I drive for (27).*

Others described employing family members themselves including spouses, parents and children. Very often they had encouraged these relatives to enter the industry, particularly if they were struggling to find work, and derived

considerable satisfaction from both helping them to find work and building a family business.

6.3.2.2 Organisation Boundary Durability

Participants also highlighted the varied durability of organisation boundaries that they had encountered as salient, because of the consequences for organisational mobility and embeddedness. Within some narratives, organisations and their associated boundaries were perceived as fragile and even short-lived. Several cab drivers reported working at times for companies that were struggling to remain in business. For example, one individual described encountering problems with an organisation that ran into cash flow problems:

> *We didn't know when we were getting paid. Sometimes we went three weeks without being paid (05).*

Whilst the company continued to trade, the situation remained unresolved for many months, so that in the end he and many of his colleagues left that organisation in order to find more stable work with other cab firms in the area. Others faced considerable challenges with running their own cab company, which were sufficient to result in them taking the decision to close. Key problems including finding dependable staff, struggling to make a profit and the pressure that running their own company placed upon them and their families:

> *It got too much… trying to find reliable people and someone who understood the industry. It was very difficult (15).*

> *I had three people working for me by that time and it was very hectic. My wife… nearly drove her crazy. And when I looked at it all, I wasn't making very much money out of it. So I gave that up and went to drive for a company (09).*

The closure of small cab driving firms and sole traders was reported in many of the narratives, highlighting the volatility of some organisation boundaries in the industry. Furthermore, company closures triggered involuntary transitions in which individuals were compelled to cross the boundary into another organisation. Whilst for some this proved a relief, for others there was a

considerable sense of failure associated with the set-back of having to close their own cab company. Finally, some participants expressed ongoing concern about the rapid growth of large corporations in London in recent years, which they felt had the potential to drive small companies out of business in the future.

In contrast to the fragility of some organisation boundaries, there was also evidence of other durable and longstanding boundaries demarcating cab companies that had been trading in their locality for many years:

> *It's pretty nigh the longest serving local taxi company. It goes back to the '70s (19).*

Furthermore, an enduring occupation boundary offered some participants the opportunity to remain for many years with a preferred organisation. For example, one taxi driver described enjoying working with a long-running local company for many years until he had to move to a different geographic location:

> *I was with the last bloke for about nine years… nine years… yeah. I blew up a couple of engines with him! (07)*

Another had worked for over 20 years with a long-standing company. This had offered him a valued sense of stability and identity, such that he had no intention of leaving to work elsewhere:

> *I've never been anywhere ever since, never left. We've all got our own things and everybody sticks to that. Everybody's got their place here (22).*

The thematic analysis therefore highlighted perceptions of relatively stable and enduring organisation boundaries, within which some drivers chose to work for many years. However, others identified a more complex and shifting backdrop of boundaries demarcating organisations that evolved, merged and disappeared across the industry over time. As a result, some described having to seek out cab driving work elsewhere if their employer ceased trading, or their own cab firm failed.

6.3.2.3 Organisation Boundary as a Status Threshold

There was also evidence that organisation boundaries had facilitated the structuring of hierarchical career pathways within the industry, but the picture was less clear-cut than for job boundaries. The majority of the sample group had crossed at least one organisation boundary and described finding it easy to do so, suggesting that they were perceived as highly permeable. Indeed, some company owners even anticipated that drivers in their locality would move from one cab firm to another with predictable regularity:

> *Some of them stay in one place, but others do the rounds of all the local companies. They flit about and then they realise they were better off where they were. (17)*

Cab drivers themselves that reported crossing a series of local organisation boundaries in this way did so in the hope of finding better rates of pay, in order to access different client groups, or simply to bring some variety to their working life:

> *It's still the same work really, but it's a different cab firm and that's always interesting (28).*

However, the thematic analysis also identified examples of particular organisation boundaries being perceived as status thresholds. For example, some perceived cab driving companies located in less salubrious parts of a town as undesirable places to work:

> *The old minicab firms, you see them looking pretty rundown… a bit unloved (27).*

Additionally, several participants reported contracting initially with a cab driving firm, but then subsequently moving on to set up a company of their own. A number of others had also worked for an organisation that they then took over when the existing owner decided to sell up. In both cases, the individuals concerned regarded their prior experience of working for somebody else as a useful way of learning about the industry, before running their own company:

To see how it's done and that, which way not to go and which way to go… yeah, it definitely did me good those couple of years. But moving on… I've moved on and got my own show now (03).

Those who went on to set-up and run their own successful cab driving business, or manage an existing one, perceived this boundary crossing process as a form of career advancement, stepping up in status from working for someone else to taking on an autonomous managerial position.

6.3.2.4 Summary

The thematic analysis highlighted that organisation boundaries in the cab driving industry were experienced as salient by all participants. Furthermore, they were interpreted as constraining or enabling careers in different ways. In demarcating different sizes and forms of cab firms, boundaries delimited an organisation of last resort for some, or alternatively provided an opportunity to undertake work with a company of choice. Varied boundary durability also had implications for organisational embeddedness and mobility. On the one hand, short-lived boundaries associated primarily with unsuccessful start-ups resulted in individuals being forced to find work elsewhere. On the other hand, more durable boundaries provided stability within the industry and offered some the opportunity to remain working with a company of choice for many years. Finally, some occupation boundaries had the potential to be perceived as status thresholds, such that leaving an established cab firm in order to set-up or manage a cab company was perceived as hierarchical career advancement.

6.4 Personal Boundaries

All of the sample groups detailed their day-to-day cab driving work experiences in their career narratives and in doing so they identified two personal career boundaries as salient. The first concerned the boundary delimiting the social relationship between the cab driver and the customers that they encountered during the course of their work. The second involved the boundary demarcating participant's cab driving work role and the broader life sphere, as they undertook daily micro role transitions between cab driving work and other life

roles. In each case, these personal boundaries were interpreted as constraining and enabling the construction of their career in different ways and these issues are examined here.

6.4.1 Cab Driver/Customer Boundary

Whilst in Chapter 4 attention was drawn to the fact that cab driving has typically been classified primarily as a 'driving' occupation, the thematic analysis identified that encounters with customers were perceived as central to cab drivers' work experiences. Every narrative included unprompted and sometimes lengthy descriptions about cab drivers' social engagements with customers and the boundary associated with this process. This was not anticipated in the *a priori* codes established for the thematic analysis and this boundary was added instead to the final template. The boundary delimiting the social relationship between the cab driver and their customers was then highlighted as salient in two capacities (Table 6.6). First, there were differences in the extent to which participants felt able to manage this boundary in order to establish a preferred level of rapport with customers. On the one hand, many participants had experienced boundary violations, including verbal and even physical abuse from customers. On the other hand, some drivers described employing proactive strategies in order to build a good rapport with customers. Second, there was evidence that drivers sought to customise the cab driver/customer boundary, which in some instances involved extending it beyond the minimum limits required by their job description to notions of friendship, family and therapist. These two perspectives are considered here in turn.

6.4.1.1 Managing the Cab Driver/Customer Boundary

The boundary between a cab driver and their customer is governed by codes of conduct set out by key licensing bodies and cab companies, which identify the key responsibilities and acceptable behaviours to be expected of both parties (Transport for London, 2019; Uber, 2020). However, across the narratives many participants identified instances in which this boundary had been breached by customers. Where cash payments were the norm, this included customers leaving the cab without paying their fare. Many also identified occasions when

they had suffered verbal and sometimes physical abuse from customers. Whilst this was reported as a more common issue with inebriated customers during night shifts, even day drivers reported problems:

> *I've been with school kids and oh the verbal abuse sometimes. His face was that close to mine. And I had to pull over and say to him 'Right, this stops' you know? (26).*

Particular groups in this study reported feeling more vulnerable to such boundary violations than others. The women drivers all opted to work as far as possible with regular customers in familiar geographic areas or during daylight hours. By circumscribing their work in this way, they reported feeling relatively safe. In contrast, some of the drivers from ethnic minority groups described being subject to racial abuse on a regular basis during both day and night shifts. Additionally, many of the male participants in this study recounted incidents of being physically punched or attacked with a knife. One taxi driver described a particularly vicious assault by three customers that left him badly injured and emotionally traumatised:

> *Knocked the stuffing out of me for a while to be honest. Several weeks I was off work. All I had in me pocket was about £30 or £40 quid… not a fortune, but these guys were prepared to kill me for that (09).*

The cab drivers in this study rarely thought to report instances of theft or abuse to the police, as they were concerned about the time that this would take out of their working day and sceptical about a successful prosecution. However, there was evidence that the impact of these difficult experiences could be cumulative and ultimately trigger a career transition:

> *In the end, after I'd had a couple of knife jobs, a couple of threatenings on the nights… I did all days after that (06).*

Table 6.6 Cab Driver/Customer Boundary

ISSUE	CONSTRAIN CAREER	ENABLE CAREER
i. Boundary Management Variation in the extent to which cab drivers wish to and can build customer rapport	**Boundary violation** Breaching of the boundary as a result of verbal/physical abuse from customers: *In the end, after I'd had a couple of knife jobs, a couple of threatenings on the nights… I did all days after that (06)*	**Building positive rapport** Proactively using strategies to deal with difficult customers, diffuse tension and enjoy a good rapport: *Some of them, they're a bit lively sometimes after the clubs and stuff. But you just get them in the cab and have a bit of a laugh (20)*
ii. Recrafting the Boundary Extending the boundary beyond standard contractual requirements	**Limits to customisation** Customisation opportunities limited by e.g. short journeys, customers who prefer no interaction: *You can get customers… you try and open a conversation with them and they don't want it. So you just have to leave 'em be, just get them there (25)*	**Customising boundary of choice** Proactively craft the boundary beyond that of cab driver to e.g. friend: *It's not work, it's social (05)* e.g. family: *You get to know them really well… yeah you do, like family really. (20)* e.g. therapist: *Whatever's said in my car, stays in my car (11)*

However, whilst many drivers felt unable to prevent the types of boundary violation outlined here, some reported using proactive strategies in order to build rapport with their customers. For example, one airport cab driver working as a sole trader reported looking up profiles of new business account customers in advance online, in order to talk to them about their work in an informed way when he met them. Another taxi driver working from a town centre rank described selecting topical issues in order to engage customers in conversation, such as a popular television cooking program:

> *So recently it's been Bake Off, 'cos I like Bake Off! My wife's a very good cook, but I bake. I did a chiffon cake recently. Yeah, a chiffon cake with chocolate and orange swirls, marbled! So that's what I talk with my customers about at the moment, Bake Off! (31)*

Furthermore, some employed strategies to deal with potentially difficult customers that they had learnt and applied in previous customer service settings. This included participants who had worked before in occupations such as the police force, retail, hairdressing and sales. For example, one participant had worked in the music industry and described drawing on that experience to use banter and good humour in order to defuse any tension with his customers:

> *Some of them, they're a bit lively sometimes after the clubs and stuff. But you just get them in the cab and have a bit of a laugh (20).*

So whilst many of the cab drivers in this study felt that there was little that they could do to manage the relational boundary with customers in order to guarantee their personal safety, some did deploy strategies aimed at managing this relationship, which offered them reassurance in terms of safety whilst undertaking their daily work.

6.4.1.2 Recrafting the Cab Driver/Customer Boundary

Across the sample group, there was variation in the degree to which individuals sought to customise the cab driver/customer boundary. On the one hand, contractually any social interaction could be limited to exchanging information about a customer's destination and for some participants this was this was certainly their preferred option:

> *All my issue is that I pick up them up at that address, I take them to the other end and they pay me. That is as much as I care, I don't want to get involved (02).*

There was also recognition that some journeys were simply too short to build any degree of rapport, or that customers themselves were sometimes only interested in being driven to their destination without the necessity to engage in any discussion:

> *You can get customers… you try and open a conversation with them and they don't want it. So you just have to leave 'em be, just get them there (25).*

However, a striking feature of some career narratives was that participants reported seeking to engage in a far more meaningful social interaction with their clientele. For example, whilst low-skilled work is typically characterised as routine, engaging in conversation with customers offered a potential source of variety in their daily work:

> *You don't know who you're going to meet, or what conversation you're going to have. All of a sudden you're talking to a World War Two spitfire pilot, or someone from another country, a different culture. And it just makes for an interesting day (23).*

Some regarded the shortest cab journey as an opportunity to strike up conversation and engage in a friendly conversation: '*It's not work, it's social' (05)*. Beyond this though, others described developing longstanding friendships over many years with regular customers in their locality. This was particularly the case with cab drivers who worked regularly in their community with elderly and disabled customers. As well as driving them, they often helped fragile customers enter and exit the cab vehicle, assisting them with their bags and even undertook domestic tasks in a manner more akin to that of a primary carer:

> *A lot of elderly people… their local minicab fella is the only person they'll see in a week. You'll take her down the clinic, you'll take her home again. And I've moved fridges for the old girls, I've put light bulbs in. They'll say 'Post this letter for me?' 'Yeah, all right then.' That's what it's like! (10).*

Another participant described transporting a disabled child to school along with their mother over the course of several years. The journey took an hour each way on a daily basis during each academic term and he had developed a close relationship with them both as a result:

> *You get to know them really well… yeah you do, like family really (20).*

Others drew attention to the potential for conversations in their cab to take a therapeutic turn. Several recounted having in-depth conversations on longer cab journeys with customers who were having a difficult time for some reason in their lives such as problems with work, their health and even relationship issues. This was attributed by some of the participants to the anonymity of the enclosed cab vehicle space and they likened themselves to a confidential therapist:

> *Whatever's said in my car, stays in my car (11).*

Whilst some of the cab drivers preferred a limited social engagement with their customers, the majority of the sample group regarded developing a close level of customer rapport as an important and highly rewarding element of their cab driving role.

6.4.1.3 Summary

The thematic analysis highlighted the centrality of the customer service role in cab driving work. More specifically, it identified the critical importance of the cab driver/customer boundary in the participants' day to day work. In terms of boundary management, some struggled with repeated violations of this boundary, ranging from fare dodging to verbal and physical abuse. Whilst some seemed resigned to this, for others it was a source of great distress and sufficient to result in them changing job. By contrast, some participants had developed strategies to build rapport, as well as manage difficult customers. A second salient feature concerned the potential for cab drivers to recraft this boundary, customising it where possible to suit their preference for using their

work role as a source of satisfying social engagement. Whilst some preferred to minimise any conversation, others sought opportunities to engage in discussion and even described crafting relationships with customers akin to friendship, family or therapist. For many, social interactions with their customers offered opportunities to achieve variety in their work, as well as the building of meaningful social relationships.

6.4.2 Cab Driving Work/Life Boundary

The final boundary that all participants identified as salient concerned the interface between cab driving work and the broader life sphere. Again, the potential salience of this boundary was anticipated in earlier chapters of this thesis, particularly given contemporary debates about working hours associated with the gig economy (Stewart, 2017). Across the career narratives, individuals made reference to working hours and earnings, but whilst some described driving in part-time roles, others worked full-time. As the sample group also comprised individuals who had entered the industry at different ages (Table 6.3), they reported experiences of undertaking cab driving at a variety of career and life stages. Furthermore, some participants also employed family members or worked for a relative, resulting in overlap between work and family life. The boundary between cab driving work and other life roles was then interpreted as salient in two ways (Table 6.7). First, participants perceived differences in the extent to which they could manage this boundary in order to achieve a preferred work/life balance. So, whilst some felt under pressure to work all hours, others perceived that they could manage the boundary in a way that enabled them to fit cab driving work around other life commitments. Second, the thematic analysis identified differences in the way that individuals interpreted precarious contractual arrangements, with some perceiving them as problematic, whilst others enjoyed being able to earn a flexible income. These two boundary issues are considered here in turn.

6.4.2.1 Managing the Cab Driving Work/Life Boundary

As outlined in Chapter 4, at the time this study was undertaken there was no legal limit in the UK regarding the maximum hours that cab drivers can work (Department for Transport, 2019). This was reflected in the fact that individuals reported working anything from only one or two shifts per week to very long hours. However, the extent to which they felt able to opt for working hours that enabled them to achieve a preferred work/life balance varied considerably. One group of participants described having to work as many hours as possible. This was particularly the case for those working as the main breadwinner in their household, who were cab driving on a full-time basis and often described the strain of trying to earn sufficient income:

> *You are under pressure to earn a certain amount a week. You've got the bills to pay, you've got the car to run. So if the work's there, you've got to do it (04).*

This included some individuals who reported working not only on a full-time basis as cab drivers, but undertaking far in excess of a standard number of hours each day or week in order to make ends meet:

> *I will admit… I have worked 28 hours in a run (11).*

> *I think you've got to do an incredible amount of hours. You've got to probably break the seventy hours a week barrier to make it work (05).*

A second group of participants who reported working long hours were those trying to build their own cab driving business. Here the pressure was in part a financial one, but also concern about missing out on the opportunity to build their customer base. As a result they struggled to relax at home, even when nominally taking time off:

> *You've just got to put the hours in… and it's a lot of hours. And I've been in that situation where you have a night off and you can't switch off totally. You think 'I could be out now' (07).*

A sense of always being on call and working antisocial hours was exacerbated by new technology, which enabled cab drivers to be contacted readily by both cab companies and customers. This was particularly problematic at night when

some described having their sleep disturbed regularly by customer telephone calls or struggling to fit in sufficient rest. As a result, some attempted to catch up on much needed sleep whilst in their cabs between jobs: '*Silly hours. You sleep when you can' (04).* Far from achieving a preferred work/life balance, those working as the main breadwinner and/or for themselves often struggled with both the long hours and a lack of sleep. This situation was compounded by a lack of clear regulation, because whilst many companies regulate working hours for their cab drivers, some individuals in this study still sometimes went on after a twelve-hour shift to undertake their own private work.

Table 6.7 Cab Driving Work/Life Boundary

ISSUE	CONSTRAIN CAREER	ENABLE CAREER
i. Boundary Management Variation in the extent to which cab drivers felt able to achieve a preferred work/life balance	**Pressure to work all hours** Feeling under pressure to work long hours in order to e.g. achieve sufficient income: *I will admit… I have worked 28 hours in a run (11)* e.g. build a business: *You've just got to put the hours in… and it's a lot of hours. And I've been in that situation where you have a night off and you can't switch off totally. You think 'I could be out now' (07)*	**Flexible boundary enabling work/life balance** Interpreting the boundary as a flexible one, offering opportunities to e.g. work preferred hours: *I can pick and choose me hours. And if I want to have a couple of days off a week or something, you know… if I want to do that then I will (09)* e.g. manage childcare commitments: *Mostly I work in part of the day and in the evenings… when my wife is not working* (29)
ii. Negotiating Contractual Boundary Precarious contracts (self-employment, no employer sick pay, pension etc.)	**Limited contractual rights** Anxiety about e.g. consequences of ill health: *And this is the thing, I had to take this month off, with the possibility of six months off. And I was thinking 'How would we… how would I cope?' (07)* e.g. limited retirement options: *And now the pensions are all gone… what do you do? (10)*	**Useful cash income** Appreciating the cash-based nature of the work: e.g. access to income, as and when required: *If I need a little more dough every now and again, then I come in on a Saturday! (24)* e.g. a tangible measure of profitable work *The best part really was Sunday morning… getting up out of bed and having a fried breakfast for a change, 'cos I never normally had time. And then emptying all the money out of me pockets! Fivers here, tenners there… a handful of pound coins! My wife she used to add it up and say 'You've taken this much!' (09)*

However, other participants perceived the cab driving work/life boundary to be a flexible one that they could manage to their personal satisfaction. For example, some liked the fact that they felt in control of when they worked:

> *Depending on who you work for, or if you work for yourself, you can be very casual, you know? If you feel like buggering off home, you can bugger off home, it's as simple as that (25).*

> *I can pick and choose me hours. And if I want to have a couple of days off a week or something, you know… if I want to do that then I will (09).*

Others exploited what they perceived as a highly flexible boundary in order to fit cab driving around childcare, or alternatively whilst trying to build another business. They achieved this flexibility by working on a part-time basis for two or three days a week, or arranging their driving work to complement a partner's working hours:

> *Mostly I work in part of the day and in the evenings… when my wife is not working* (29).

Another described achieving '*quality time with the kids' (06)*, by arranging his working hours to ensure that he could pick up his children from school, as well as take time off during school holidays. Both male and female cab drivers in the study therefore identified flexible working hours as a key means of managing their childcare commitments. In a similar way, others found working part-time as a cab driver a useful means of earning a guaranteed income whilst setting up alternative businesses such as property development.

Participants running their own business also often recounted employing parents, spouses and siblings as drivers for periods of time, which illustrated the potential for cab driving work and family life to sometimes overlap significantly. All of this group spoke positively about working with members of their family. Some felt that they were able to request preferred hours, which would not have been achievable working for another employer. For others, employing family members who they felt that they could rely on was far preferable to trying to recruit unknown cab drivers. Additionally, some expressed enjoyment and a sense of camaraderie associated with working alongside extended family:

When I am driving around I see my father, my cousins also driving. Some of my uncles too. And I really like that! (27)

Finally, there evidence that some found it useful to have an option to shift between part-time and full-time cab driving work. For example, some of those who did not succeed in setting-up an alternative business were able to fall back on cab driving:

And then the property thing didn't work out…. so I decided to go taxi driving full time (23).

Others also described the potential benefits of moving from full-time to part-time cab driving work as they approached retirement, in order to ease up on their working hours whilst also still maintaining some income and keeping busy.

6.4.2.2 Negotiating the Contractual Boundary

The precarious nature of the contractual boundary in the cab driving industry was discussed in earlier chapters, particularly regarding its potential to impact negatively upon the work/life boundary. In this study, there was certainly evidence that contractual arrangements associated with the prevalence of self-employment in the cab driving industry were perceived as problematic. For example, whilst some had transitioned into cab driving work in the first instance as a result of illness, others expressed anxiety about the fact that subsequent poor health could prove problematic. In particular, a small number of participants described developing unexpected health problems that had necessitated them not only having time off, but also resulted in their licenses being suspended. One developed sleep apnoea and had his licences revoked immediately until he had recovered:

I lost my driving license and I had to surrender my taxi license. And then I came back once the DVLA had classed me as all clear, had it under control (02).

Another had developed serious heart problems and similarly had his cab driving licence suspended. He described being very anxious about when he would be

well enough to return to work because his health insurance only covered his loss of income for a limited time:

> *And this is the thing, I had to take this month off, with the possibility of six months off. And I was thinking 'How would we… how would I cope?' (07).*

Whilst at the time of interview his health had improved and he had returned to work, he expressed considerable concern about his future health and the possibility of having to take unpaid time off.

Another common issue for older participants in the study was the nature of their pension provision. In particular, some were anxious that they would have to continue working indefinitely, because of problems with private pension schemes:

> *And now the pensions are all gone… what do you do? (10).*

As a result, some were caught between worrying about their future health and the potential for losing their license, whilst also feeling under pressure to continue to work because of poor pension provision that limited their retirement options.

In contrast, some of the sample group spoke positively about their contractual arrangements, which they perceived as offering access to a usefully flexible income. Whilst technological developments meant that cab customers were increasingly paying by card, at the time of this study many cab drivers were still taking cash payments. This was often regarded as a considerable advantage, as unlike monthly salaries or even weekly incomes, it provided access to ready cash-in-hand. Furthermore, some liked the fact that if they worked extra hours they could realise the cash benefit straight away. This was perceived as particularly useful for covering unexpected costs, as well as expensive seasonal events such as Christmas or holidays:

> *If I need a little more dough every now and again, then I come in on a Saturday! (24)*

Cash-in-hand was also regarded as useful for funding costs associated with, for example, establishing a new business without having recourse to taking out a bank loan:

> *So I decided to do taxi driving on Friday and Saturday night… and then have that as a bit of a cash income for developing the properties (23).*

However, the receipt of hard cash was in itself also a source of considerable satisfaction for some of the cab drivers, as tangible evidence of their earnings and an indication of their financial wellbeing. As one of the participants suggested: *Most people don't see their money, but I do (09)*. Another even described experiencing a tangible thrill in earning cash:

> *I assume it's like gambling when you win! But you can win every hour! (05)*

As a result, one of the key pleasures to be had for some of the participants who had run their own business was to count up their cash takings at the end of a busy week:

> *The best part really was Sunday morning… getting up out of bed and having a fried breakfast for a change, 'cos I never normally had time. And then emptying all the money out of me pockets! Fivers here, tenners there… a handful of pound coins! My wife she used to add it up and say 'You've taken this much!' (09).*

So, whilst the precarious nature of contracts in the cab driving industry were undoubtedly highly problematic and a source of great anxiety for some cab drivers, there was also evidence that the ability to earn ready cash could not only be useful, but also offer a tangible sense of career satisfaction.

6.4.2.3 Summary

The thematic analysis highlighted the importance of the cab driving work/life boundary. In particular, it identified how some struggled to manage this boundary and worked excessively long hours, whilst others were able to achieve a preferred work/life balance. These perceptions were shaped in

particular by career and life stages, as those attempting to build a business and/or working as the main breadwinner often felt under great pressure to work all hours. In contrast, some of those with childcare commitments, or other interests such as a building another business, were able to work flexible, part-time hours. The contractual nature of this boundary was also regarded in markedly different ways. On the one hand, age played a part in raising concerns about limited health insurance and pension provision restricting retirement options. On the other hand, access to a flexible cash income was interpreted by some as a useful means of boosting their earnings as and when necessary, as well as offering a highly rewarding sense of a job well done.

6.5 Conclusion

The thematic analysis highlighted the central role that key career boundaries play in the context of a low-skilled occupation. Three forms of boundary were identified as salient in every career narrative: occupation, intra-occupation (job, occupation) and personal (cab driver/customer, cab driving work/life). Whilst some of these were anticipated as potentially salient, the cab driver/customer boundary was identified as unexpectedly important. This reflected the centrality of customer service to this type of work, which is often unacknowledged in occupation classification systems. Beyond this though, each type of boundary was interpreted as a complex phenomenon that could be experienced as salient in different capacities. For example, the occupation, job and organisation boundaries were perceived as important status thresholds by some participants. However, this was not the case for all cab drivers in the sample group, who identified other boundary properties such as permeability or durability to be important. Furthermore, each of these issues was interpreted in markedly different ways as constraining or enabling the construction of a career. The thematic analysis therefore identified a complex picture. For some, key career boundaries were interpreted as anything from barriers to preferred work roles, fragile entities under threat, or unmanageable personal boundaries. However, for others they offered options to work in a skilled profession, specialise in jobs and organisations of choice, perceive career advancement and curate personal boundaries.

This chapter has examined the types of career boundaries that cab driver selected as salient and the many different ways in which they were perceived as important. The following chapter builds on this thematic analysis by examining how individuals ordered and evaluated their key career boundary experiences and the different types of career narrative that were shaped as a result.

CHAPTER 7 RESULTS: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

7.1 Introduction

Whilst the previous chapter examined the results of the thematic analysis, this one presents the findings from the narrative analysis. In doing so it moves on to address the third research question [RQ]:

RQ3. What type of career narrative do cab drivers construct about their career boundary experiences?

The thematic analysis had identified that all of the cab drivers in this study selected the same core set of career boundaries as salient in their career narrative: occupation, job, organisation, cab driver/customer, cab driving work/life. As described in Chapter 5, interpreting and classifying different types of narrative plotline form was then achieved by examining chronological and evaluative data associated with these five key career boundaries across each cab driver's career narrative. Additionally, researcher reflexivity material was used to help classify each career narrative. The different types of career narratives identified through this analysis then reflected the varied ways that cab drivers in this study ordered and evaluated their key career boundary experiences to construct a meaningful plotline.

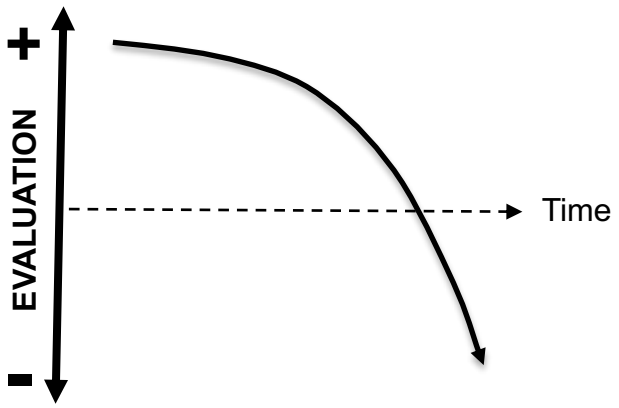
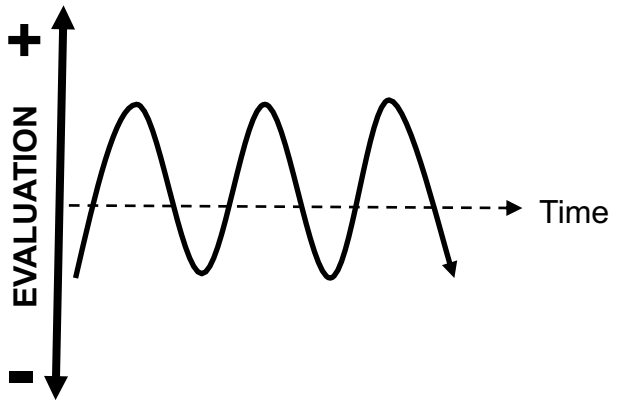
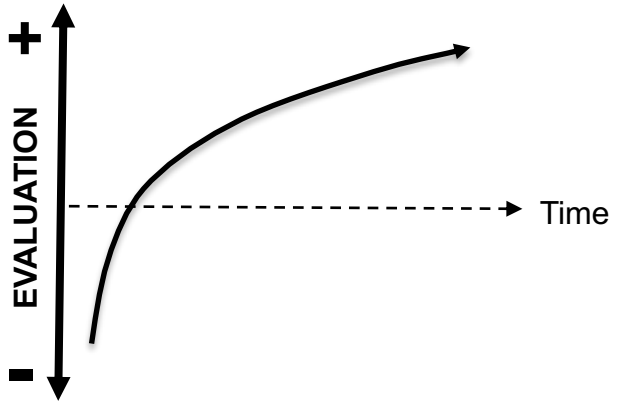
Earlier chapters of this thesis have highlighted that cab driving work has been characterised typically as a low-skilled, precarious and dirty occupation. As such, it has often been regarded as undesirable and problematic work, offering few opportunities to construct a meaningful career. Cab drivers themselves might therefore be expected to construct regressive career narratives, reflecting difficulties with repetitive work, low pay, contractual issues, low status and poor

career prospects. However, whilst this was certainly the case in some instances in this study, a much wider array of career narrative plotline types was also identified.

These results are presented in three sections which reflect the key types of narrative plotline that were constructed across the data set: regressive, cyclical and progressive (Figure 7.1). The first section identifies regressive career narratives in which cab driving was interpreted as either a last resort, or fleeting work. In both cases, these narratives aligned with prevailing ideas about low-skilled work as problematic. The second section reports on a group of cyclical narratives whereby cab driving was undertaken as recurrent work, involving repeated occupation boundary crossing into and out of the trade. Unlike traditional notions of formless job-hopping associated with low-skilled work, this group of career narratives highlighted the potential for individuals to return many times to a familiar occupation. The third section identities a set of progressive narratives: means to an end; second chance; salvation; final and lifelong career. This group of career narratives highlighted the unexpectedly varied ways in which cab drivers constructed a meaningful and positive career in the context of this low-skilled occupation.

Each of the eight career narrative types is discussed in detail in this chapter. This includes identifying the defining features of each career narrative category from a career boundary perspective and an illustrative plotline graphic. An exemplar from each category is also explored in more detail. For reference, the supporting chronological and evaluative data tables associated with each exemplar are set out in Appendix 9, along with reflexive extracts from my fieldwork journal.

Figure 7.1 Overview of Career Narrative Types

1. Regressive Narratives: Bleak narratives of wrong paths, marginalisation, poverty and despair. a. Last Resort (29, 30) b. Fleeting (05, 25)	
2. Cyclical Narratives Rollercoaster narratives of repeated entry/exit into the trade and career highs/lows. a. Recurrent (01, 02, 08, 28)	
3. Progressive Narratives Uplifting narratives of quiet heroism, rewarding work and working to live. a. Means to an End (10, 13, 23, 24) b. Second Chance (03, 07, 12, 18, 20, 21, 26) c. Salvation (11, 22, 31) d. Final (4, 16, 17, 19) e. Lifelong (06, 09, 14, 15, 27, 32)	

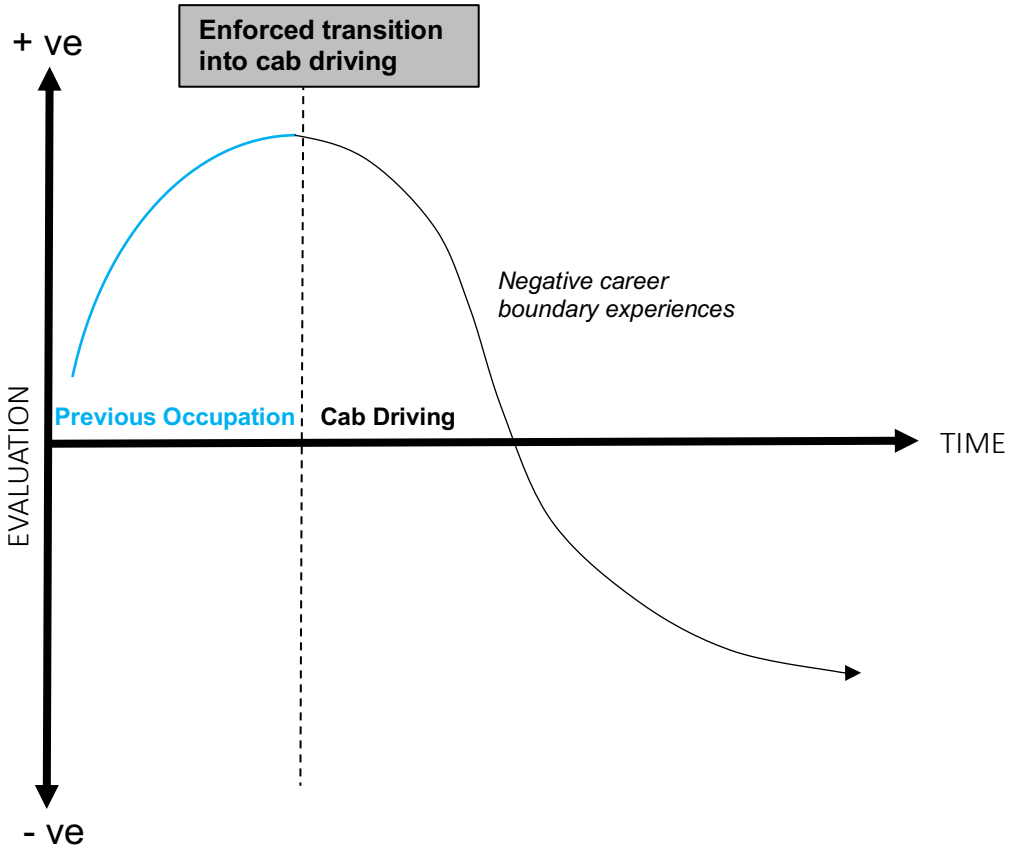
7.2 Regressive Narratives

In this category of career narratives, crossing the occupation boundary and undertaking cab driving work was constructed as a regressive plotline. This reflected a predominance of difficult career boundary experiences. Overall, these regressive narratives stood out from the data set as bleak accounts that were troubling to hear, particularly when the problems that participants identified with cab driving career boundaries remained ongoing and unresolved. This group of regressive narratives were then further subdivided into two types. The first were constructed by cab drivers who perceived themselves to be trapped indefinitely in work of last resort. However, in the second type cab driving was constructed as fleeting work, with individuals opting to leave the trade in less than one year.

7.2.1 'Last Resort' Career Narrative

In this type of career narrative, key career boundaries were all perceived as problematic career constraints which were reflected in the construction of a regressive career narrative plotline (Figure 7.2). These narratives identified that individuals had struggled with cab driving from the outset. This situation arose when individuals were forced to leave a prior job as a result of unforeseen circumstances such as ill health, redundancy or emigration from their home country. They all then applied for work in other preferred occupations, but when those applications failed they crossed the occupation boundary into cab driving work reluctantly as a last resort instead. This difficult experience was further compounded by interpreting the enforced boundary crossing into cab driving as a career demotion from a higher status occupation. Individuals then also struggled to identify and cross a career boundary into any preferred job or organisation within the cab driving industry. They also faced challenges with building positive customer rapport, whilst at the same time feeling compelled to work long hours in order to earn sufficient income. However, rather than being able to resolve these problems by subsequently leaving the cab driving trade, these participants struggled to find alternative work and felt trapped indefinitely within this particular occupation boundary.

Figure 7.2 'Last Resort' Career Narrative



Both of the career narratives in this category were constructed by individuals from an ethnic minority background who had emigrated to England. One had moved with his wife and young family from Pakistan, with the aim of accessing better educational and career opportunities for his children (Driver 29). However, whilst he had worked as a railway manager in his home country, he struggled to gain access to similar status work in his new host country and resorted to cab driving instead. The other participant in this group (Driver 30) had succeeded in finding work in England as a baker that he enjoyed, but then had difficulty finding preferred work after developing health problems. The nature of this participant's regressive 'Last Resort' career narrative is discussed here:

'Last Resort' Exemplar: Rahim (Driver 30)

At the commencement of his career narrative, Rahim described moving to the UK with his wife from Nigeria thirty years previously when he was in his mid 20s. Prior to emigrating, he had found it difficult to find work in his home country, which prompted him to move to the UK in search of a better standard of living. He initially undertook a variety of jobs in the London area, working as a waiter and cook in local cafes and restaurants, before applying successfully for a job as a baker in a family run business. He was made welcome in that company as part of a close-knit team, enjoyed learning a skilled trade as a baker and worked in this role for over ten years. However, a serious heart attack in his late 40s resulted in him having to spend several months in hospital and then recuperating at home. Whilst he was eventually considered fit to work again, he was advised by the medical profession not to return to his strenuous job as a baker, but to find more sedentary work instead.

At this point Rahim's career narrative took a sharply regressive turn. Devastated by the fragile state of his health and the loss of his valued job in a company where he had been happy, he applied instead for a variety of office-based jobs. None of his applications proved successful though and eventually he and his wife were forced to move out of their home and live with relatives as a result of getting into debt. He was finally encouraged by a family friend to join him in

working for a large company as a minicab driver, which he felt that he had little choice other than to do:

> *When I worked at the bakery, I enjoyed that work. It was hard work, but it was a good job, an important job. But then I had to do the minicabs… it's not a good job, nobody thinks of you as a good person, you know?*

So, whilst Rahim was arguably successful in finding employment by transitioning across the cab driving occupation boundary, his subjective perception was of a demotion from the skilled baking work that he had previously enjoyed. He regarded a minicab job in particular as low status cab driving work, but lacked both the social networks and finances to cross the boundary into his preferred option of taxi driving work:

> *But the problem is you need to know someone for the taxis. You need to know someone and you need money… money for the licenses.*

Whilst he had considered moving on from the minicab driving company he worked for, he lacked the confidence to approach unknown employers. He also described struggling to manage the cab driver/customer role boundary as a result of experiencing regular racist abuse, in marked contrast to having been made welcome by colleagues and customers in his prior role as a baker:

> *You are black and customers do not want this, they do not want you to drive them.*

To compound these problems, Rahim often felt under pressure to work long hours to earn sufficient money to make ends meet and settle debts, so found it difficult to achieve any preferred work/life balance. His few attempts to leave cab driving had also failed, with ongoing applications for office work proving unsuccessful, to the point where he was resigned to remaining as a minicab driver:

> *I am black and I am ill. It is difficult to find work. Who wants you to work for them? And so this is why I am minicab driving. What else is there to do? This is the only thing that I can do now.*

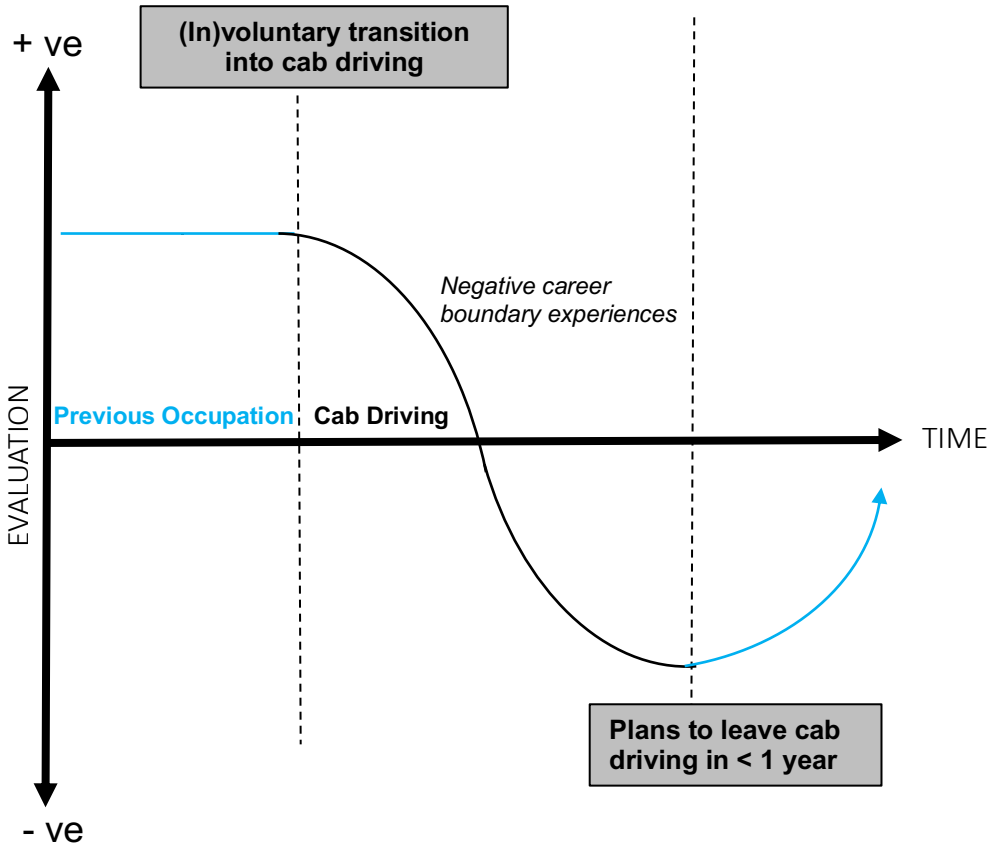
Overall, this participant constructed a highly regressive career narrative that reflected not only the difficulties he faced in managing key career boundaries, but the perception of being negatively embedded in an occupation that he felt unable to leave.

7.2.2 'Fleeting' Career Narrative

The second group of regressive narratives illustrated the potential for cab driving to be short-lived work undertaken for less than a year (Figure 7.3). Whilst some described crossing the occupation boundary involuntarily as a result of issues such as prior redundancy, others opted to do so voluntarily. However, the defining feature of these career narratives was their subsequent regression into the realisation that cab driving was not the best option for them, culminating in a decision to leave the trade. Unlike the 'Last Resort' group, these participants described some positive career boundary experiences. However, these were outweighed by other negative career boundary experiences that were sufficient to result in them seeking out alternative work with a view to leaving the trade. These career narratives therefore highlighted how some individuals crossed the occupation boundary into and back out of cab driving within a short time, akin to the traditional representation of low-skilled career mobility as a boundaryless 'job-hopping' process (Brown, 2016, p. 222).

One of the participants in this category described having difficulty finding work following redundancy from a retail manager role (Driver 05). This individual then struggled to find other work at a similar managerial level, despite making a wide range of job applications. Disheartened and in urgent need of income to support his family, he took what he perceived as a career demotion into cab driving work, but decided to leave after struggling to earn sufficient income. The other participant (Driver 25) opted to cross the occupation boundary from long-distance lorry driving to cab driving work, but had problems settling in the trade. The nature of his regressive 'Fleeting' career narrative is discussed here:

Figure 7.3 'Fleeting' Career Narrative



'Fleeting' Exemplar: Melvin (Driver 25)

At the outset of his career narrative, Melvin recounted being fascinated by vehicles as a child, helping his father renovate cars as a schoolboy hobby and being taught by him to drive off-road at 14 years of age. He went on to leave school with few education qualifications, in order to fulfil his teenage ambition to become an international lorry driver which he did happily for over thirty years. However, as he entered his 50s he began looking for *'something a bit easier'* and closer to home. He therefore decided to apply for a job as a cab driver advertised by a local taxi firm, because the role would utilise his prior lorry driving skills. The company advised him about obtaining his taxi driving license and provided a rental vehicle, enabling him to cross the occupation boundary into the trade *'without hardly thinking about it.'*

In moving on to describe his day-to-day cab driving work, Melvin recounted some positive career boundary experiences. He had applied successfully for work with a small taxi company where he got on well with the manager. He was also proud of his commission driver status, because he was renting one of the firm's newest vehicles: *'My car is one of the best in the fleet.'* However, his career narrative went on to regress as he described having difficulties adjusting to cab driving for two key reasons. First, his working hours proved considerably more demanding than he had anticipated:

> *'It's bloody hard work to be honest. It's bloody long hours to make a living. I'm on six days a week, working 12 hour shifts.'*

Far from spending more time at home with his family as he had hoped, he struggled instead with the number of working hours required to bring in sufficient income as the family breadwinner. Additionally, whilst he enjoyed driving his taxi and planning routes around the locality, managing the cab driver/customer boundary also proved more challenging than he had anticipated:

> *Well I had to change, because in the wagons you can be very on your own and it was all right to be terrible and grumpy. But you can't be like that with customers here, you've got to be on best behaviour.*

As a result of these issues, Melvin outlined plans to leave the trade after working for just under a year as a cab driver and return instead to his original occupation:

> *I miss the wagons. Surprised meself really, I do miss 'em. You can get a man out the truck you know, but you can't get the truck out the man and that's the thing really. So I haven't told the missus yet, haven't told them here actually, but I've got an offer of some better paid trucking work… here and around London*.

Melvin's career narrative therefore described feeling positive initially about crossing the occupation boundary into a preferred cab driving job and organisation. However, the plotline then shifted into a regressive account of his struggles with managing personal boundaries, that were sufficient to prompt him to plan a return to his prior occupation.

7.2.3 Summary

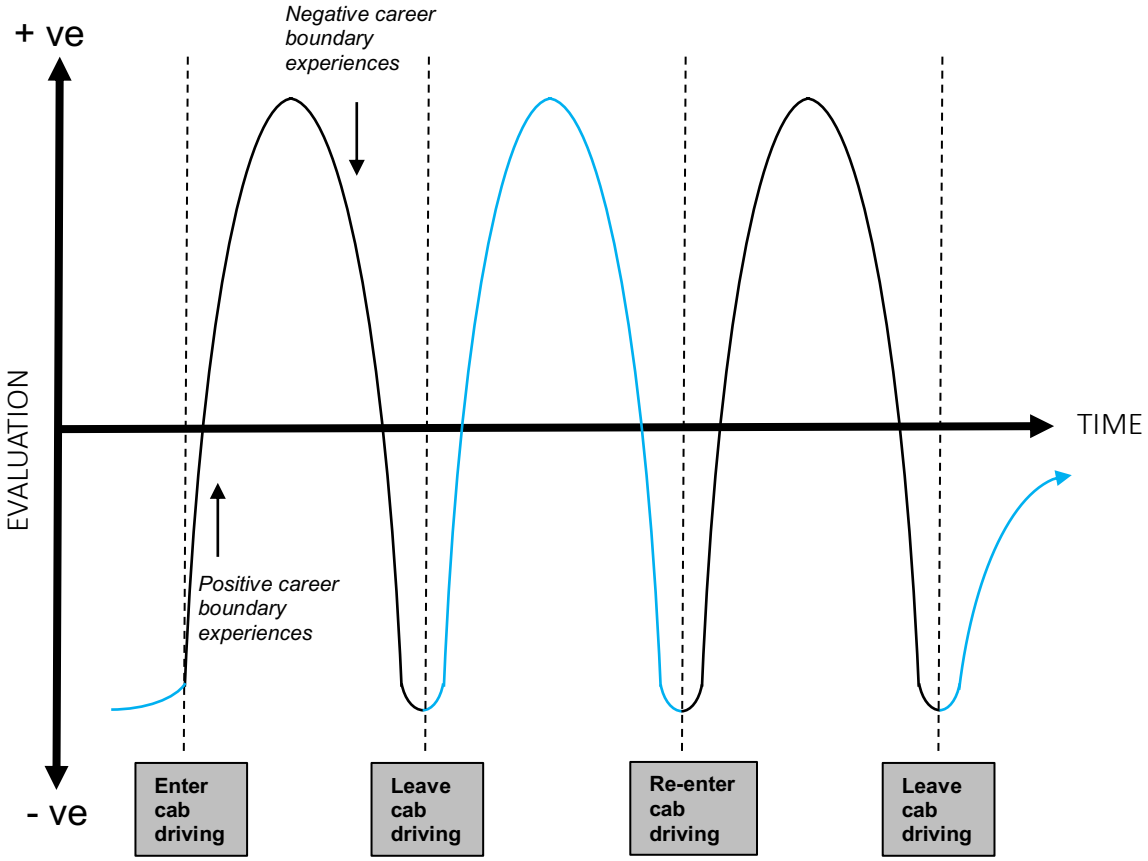
These regressive career narratives exemplified how cab driving can be subjectively experienced as unwelcome and challenging work. In doing so, these particular interpretations aligned with wider concerns across society of low-skilled work as problematic for those undertaking it. For the participants who crossed the occupation boundary as a last resort, cab driving was something to be endured from the outset as the only perceived work option. Factors such as ethnic background, ill health and a lack of career capital left these participants struggling to cross career boundaries into jobs or organisations of choice. Furthermore, they faced considerable challenges with managing personal boundaries in order to achieve any positive social rapport with customers, or a preferred work/life balance. By way of contrast, the other group of regressive career narratives illustrated how some enter the trade voluntarily into work of choice. However, a regressive plotline then unfolded as boundary issues such as the acute strain of working long hours to earn sufficient income took their toll, resulting in a subsequent decision to leave this occupation.

7.3 Cyclical Narratives

This category of career narratives was characterised by cyclical plotlines, which reflected participants experiences of transitioning repeatedly in and out of the cab driving trade (Figure 7.4). These cyclical narratives switched back and forth between predominantly positive and negative career boundary experiences. So, whilst crossing the occupation boundary into cab driving was constructed initially as a positive turning point in the career narrative, the plotline then shifted into a regressive cycle as individuals struggled to manage key career boundaries and subsequently left the trade. In each case though, these participants went on to enter and exit cab driving work on three or more further occasions. These career narratives therefore constructed cab driving as recurrent work, characterised by career boundaries being perceived as repeatedly enabling and then constraining an individual's career.

Four participants constructed cyclical career narratives. One of these began cab driving whilst at university in order to help subside the cost of his studies (Driver 28). After graduating, he went on try and establish a career in the music industry, but experienced regular spells of unemployment during which time he would take up cab driving again. Another took up cab driving work for his father's company, but left the trade when that firm went into receivership (Driver 01). However, he returned to cab driving again repeatedly after periods of unemployment and ill health. A third transitioned during his early career into minicab driving work, but then left to train as an engineer (Driver 08). Several years later he trained as a London black cab driver whilst under threat of redundancy and returned to this role during periods of unemployment, or to occasionally supplement his income. A fourth participant (Driver 02) similarly described entering and exiting the cab driving trade multiple times and the nature of his cyclical 'Recurrent' career narrative is discussed here:

Figure 7.4 ‘Recurrent’ Career Narrative



7.3.1 'Recurrent' Career Narrative

Exemplar: Steve (Driver 02)

In the opening stage of his career narrative, Steve described training at catering college after leaving school and then working in several restaurants, reaching a position of head chef that he enjoyed. He was forced to leave this work suddenly, however, when he developed acute food handling allergies. After a period of unemployment, he worked his way up to a managerial position in a local retail outlet, but was frustrated by his rigid working hours. He was in his late 20s at this stage and decided to try cab driving work, because both his father and grandfather had previously run cab firms. He found crossing the occupation boundary into cab driving straightforward, as a friend offered him a job locally as a taxi driver, helped him with the licensing paperwork and provided a rental vehicle.

He opted initially to take up a part-time, night shift cab driving job alongside his retail manager role, to see if he liked the work. After a few months of trialling taxi driving, he decided to take it up on a full-time basis. During this first phase in the trade, he established a strong preference for working as a night driver, a role that he continued to seek out each time he returned:

> *All my cab life has been nights, yeah. You get to see the world in a whole new light when you're doing the night shift. You're ferrying around the drug dealers, the prostitutes, the drunk businessmen, the drunk lawyers, the people up to affairs and no good.*

However, he also described crossing organisation boundaries between local cab firms frequently, often as a result of falling out with colleagues:

> *I phoned up the owner and he had the wrong attitude. So I went in and proceeded to launch my computer at him across the office and told him what he could do with his job. Left. Then started working for [cab company name].*

Additionally, Steve identified recurrent problems with managing the cab driving/work life boundary during his early years in the trade. He recounted how the years spent working long, antisocial hours took a considerable toll on his

personal life: *Cost me my first marriage, working all the nights*. As a result, he left cab driving with the aim of working more regular hours as a security guard:

> *I tried to go back to sort of having set hours, being home at certain times. Weren't being dragged out by cab companies 'cos they were short of drivers.*

Whilst this transition resulted in a more settled home life, he missed some aspects of the autonomy and flexibility of cab driving work. He therefore described taking the decision to cross the occupation boundary back into cab driving two years later to set up his own taxi firm. However, whilst he enjoyed building up his own company, his career narrative switched back to a regressive cycle when he described working very long hours and getting into debt due to over-expansion. This resulted in him closing the company down, leaving the trade as a result of stress and returning once again to more routine security guard work.

Steve's career narrative continued to describe episodes of transitioning in and out of the trade. This included having his cab driving license suspended temporarily because of health problems, as well as leaving cab driving to set up a short-lived coffee shop business. In the final stages of his narrative, he described his rationale for returning once again to an occupation that he often described as dirty work, but still valued for its flexible working practices:

> *So yeah, I've been in and out of the trade. But as much as it's a shit trade, I like it. I like the freedom, it's quite pure and simple. And if you need to earn money, you can go and earn it, you know? So long as you're working for the right company, if times are hard there's nothing stopping you getting off your sofa and going 'Do you know what, I'm going out to work, going to earn a couple of hundred quid.'*

Steve's narrative therefore described crossing the occupation boundary into cab driving work repeatedly and in different ways. For example, by gaining experience in the trade, he moved on from working initially for a cab firm, to setting up his own company when he returned a second time. However, whilst he was sometimes able to manage key career boundaries to his satisfaction, at other times he was not. In particular, the availability of flexible hours was both a key attraction of working in the trade, but also at times took a serious toll on his

home life and health, thereby prompting some of his recurrent transitions into and out of the trade.

7.3.2 Summary

The cyclical narratives in this group were defined by rollercoaster plotlines that reflected the ups and downs of not only the narrators' cab driving career boundary experiences, but their wider lives as well. On the one hand, crossing the occupation boundary was perceived initially as facilitating ready access to work of choice, but was then subsequently experienced as problematic work. The reasons for this included struggling to manage the cab driving work/life boundary, as well as challenges associated with processes such as setting up and running a cab firm. However, rather than leaving the trade permanently, individuals returned again. In part this was driven by problems experienced with the nature of the work that they undertook in between cab driving. However, individuals were also drawn back to the cab driving industry in order to take advantage of its associated career boundaries, at least in the short-term. Experiences of previous career boundary challenges were effectively set aside, with individuals returning to cab driving once again with a view to working in a preferred job role, autonomous working and control over flexible hours. A cyclical plotline therefore unfolded, as career boundary issues prompted repeated cycles of entry into and exit from this occupation.

7.4 Progressive Narratives

A third set of narratives were identified in which undertaking cab driving work was constructed overall as as a progressive plotline. Across these narratives, individuals described transitioning into the trade for a wide variety of reasons and at different life stages. However, a common feature was that salient career boundaries were perceived positively. These were uplifting narratives to hear, in which even involuntary moves into the trade went on to resolve into a positive outcome for the individual concerned. This group of narratives was then further subdivided into five types. The first constructed cab driving as a means to an

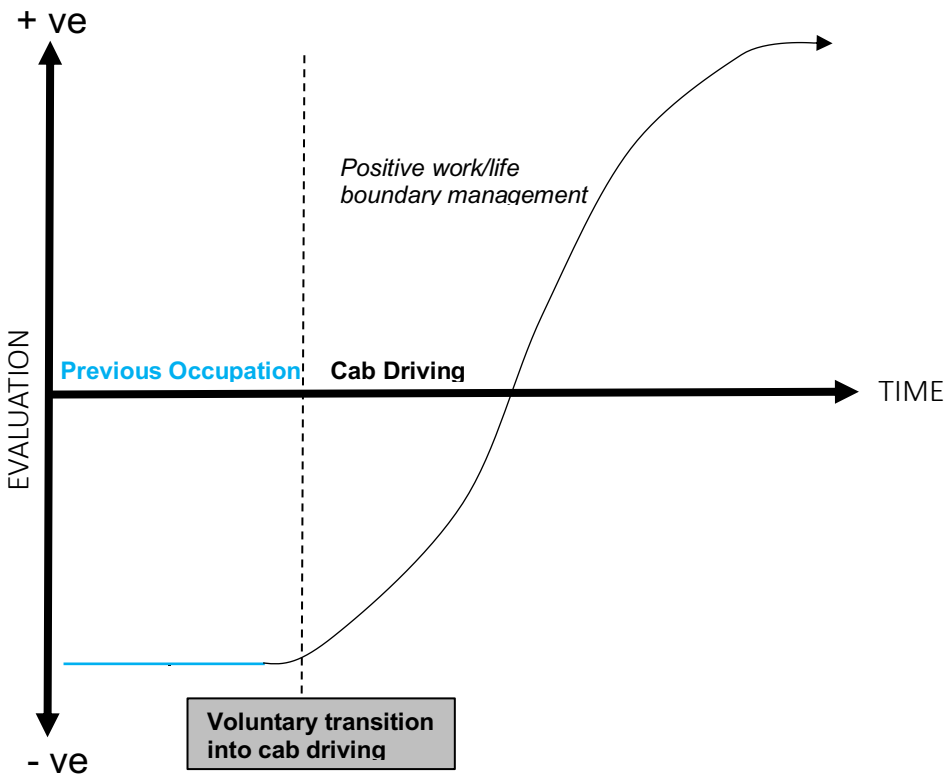
end, whereby working flexible hours enabled individuals to attend to personal priorities such as childcare, or setting up a new business. The next interpreted cab driving as a second chance to build a career, following setbacks in other occupations such as unemployment or ill health. In the third type, cab driving was perceived as salvation from low status work. A fourth type was characterised by voluntary moves into the trade as a final career opportunity prior to retirement, whilst the fifth type constructed cab driving as a satisfying and lifelong career.

7.4.1 'Means to an End' Career Narrative

This type of career narrative plotline reflected positive experiences of working as a cab driver in order to earn money that enabled individuals to focus upon other more important aspects of their life (Figure 7.5). Here the interest was less in cab driving as intrinsically interesting or well-paid work, but primarily as a flexible means of working. These narratives all described purposefully crossing the occupation boundary to take up work in jobs and organisations that offered the desired degree of flexible contractual opportunities. Individuals then perceived that they were able to manage the work/life boundary to their personal satisfaction, by working flexible hours of choice to accommodate other life priorities.

One participant decided to transition from a bank clerk role, to follow her husband into the trade as a black cab driver so that they could both work part-time and share childcare (Driver 13). Three others transitioned into cab driving on a part-time basis with a view to earning a basic income whilst building a business. One had been made redundant from a recruitment consultancy role and retrained to work as a black cab driver whilst opening a specialist gin bar (Driver 10). Another left the building trade where he had worked as a labourer, in order to take up taxi driving whilst he set up a property repair business (Driver 23). A third left the banking sector to set up a property rental business (Driver 24) and the nature of his progressive 'Means to an End' career narrative is discussed here:

Figure 7.5 ‘Means to an End’ Career Narrative



'Means to an End' Exemplar: Keith (Driver 24)

Keith's career narrative recalled leaving school at the age of 18 in order to help run his father's furniture manufacturing company. Having worked there for ten years though, he described wanting to establish his own career and so trained as a personal financial advisor. He went on to work in this capacity for several national banks, before taking a series of promotions that meant by the age of 40 he was managing a department of two hundred financial sales staff. However, he highlighted the personal consequences that his managerial responsibilities demanded:

> *Oh I was totally stressed up in my 30s and 40s. It was awful… it takes its toll, deadlines and targets and things. You know what corporate life's like, more and more pressure is put on you in that sort of work these days. And I wasn't at the bottom, I wasn't at the top, I was stuck in the middle with all the pressure.*

As a result, he decided to leave the banking sector in his late 40s in order to set up his own property development company.

In order to earn an interim income whilst he built up that business, Keith's narrative described opting to take up taxi driving at the suggestion of his nephew (Driver 22). He carefully investigated his occupation boundary crossing options and decided to become licensed as a taxi driver, as well as purchase his own preferred vehicle. He joined the same cab firm as his nephew, as the manager there agreed that he could work part-time hours to suit him. In terms of day-to-day work, he identified his prior sales experience as useful in managing the cab driver/customer boundary, as he was used to building rapport with clients. He gave greatest emphasis in his narrative though to the flexibility of his taxi driving role. This included visiting his rental properties between cab driving jobs and dealing with administration tasks and telephone queries at those times when he was waiting at local taxi ranks:

> *When there's time on the ranks at all then I can sort out other things with the property stuff, so it fits in quite well.*

Far from interpreting the transition into cab driving as a demotion from his senior banking role, Keith's narrative focused instead upon the key benefits that he perceived:

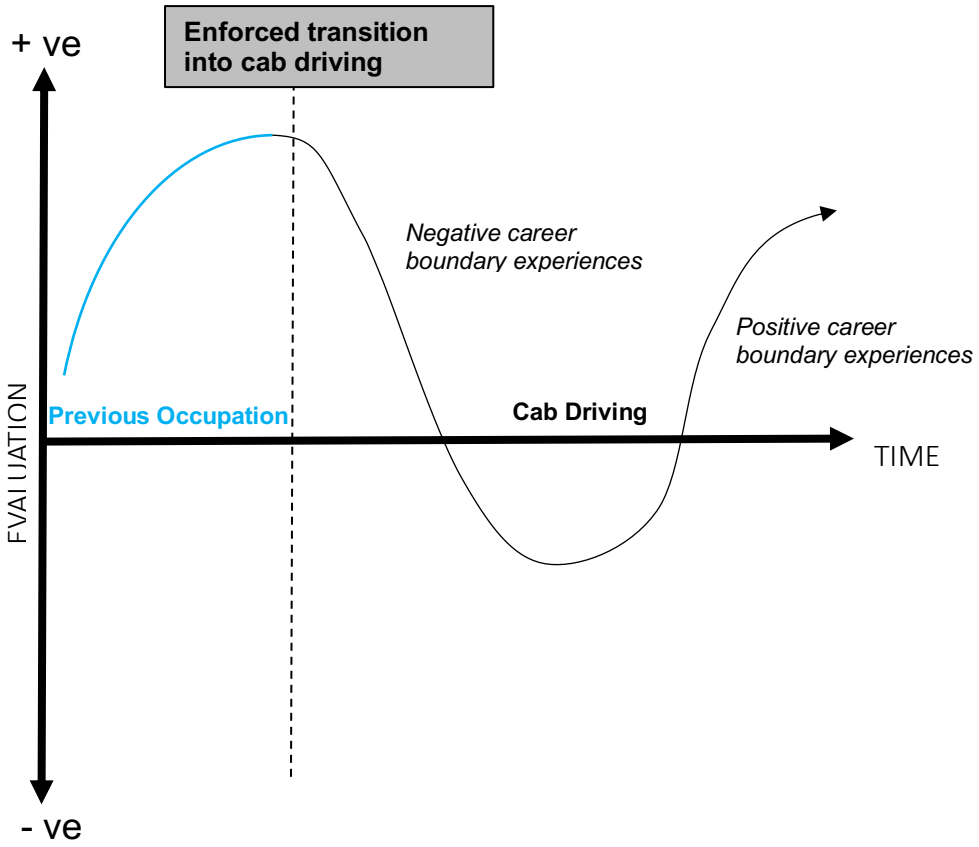
> *So it's a sea change from banking, but being local and being flexible that was OK, that was what I was looking for. And I enjoy the flexibility of it I think more than anything.*

This career narrative therefore constructed the transition into cab driving work as a progressive plotline shift. Far from being an enforced transition, it represented a carefully planned and agentic occupation boundary crossing into a job and organisation of choice. Whilst this individual had the personal skills to deal with customers effectively, above all he was able to exploit the flexibility of cab driving to work on developing his property business.

7.4.2 'Second Chance' Career Narrative

In this type of narrative, taking up cab driving took the form of an enforced move from an established career as a result of either redundancy, or developing health problems (Figure 7.6). Crossing the occupation boundary into cab driving was therefore constructed initially as a regressive plotline shift, as individuals found themselves unexpectedly forced to leave preferred occupations they had trained and worked in for many years. However, unlike the regressive career narratives identified earlier in this chapter, these narratives went on to describe settling into the trade eventually and identifying key career boundaries as enabling phenomena. This included going on to cross career boundaries into preferred jobs and organisations, as well as managing personal boundaries to build meaningful customer rapport and achieve a preferred work/life balance.

Figure 7.6 ‘Second Chance’ Career Narrative



Two participants described having to leave their prior occupation as a result of ill-health and took up cab driving instead. One of these had worked as a roofer and suffered serious injuries as the result of a fall (Driver 18), whilst another worked for many years as a plumber but developed chronic arthritis (Driver 20). They both subsequently transitioned into cab driving as relatively sedentary work. A further five participants turned to cab driving following redundancy from occupations that included managing a poultry farm (Driver 03), swimming lifeguard (Driver 07) and an IT role in the finance sector (Driver 26). Two others transitioned following redundancy from the London print trade (Driver 12; Driver 21) and it is the former that is set out in more detail here. The nature of his progressive 'Second Chance' career narrative is as follows:

'Second Chance' Exemplar: Neil (Driver 12)

At the outset of his career narrative, Neil recounted being offered a printing apprenticeship by a family friend in the East End of London. He therefore left school at the age of 16, undertook a four year apprenticeship and went on to work as a printer for five years. He described loving this work, but as new technology began to impact on the print trade he was made redundant. He remained in the industry for a number of years though, setting up and successfully running his own specialist print firm. However, as the print trade continued to contract, he struggled to find sufficient customers and was forced in the end to shut his company down. By now in his mid-30s, he decided to follow the example of some colleagues from the print industry who had moved on into cab driving:

> *Because you get to that age where you've got a house and things like that. And you think 'Well what can you learn from scratch? There's not many things you can go back to, find an education to do.' And cab driving is a way of doing it, to get a good living.*

Neil began minicab driving initially, as he was short of money and this offered a quick and easy occupation boundary crossing route. However, having met others working in this occupation he then decided to train as a London black cab driver, which he perceived as a more profitable job in the longer term. He decided to undertake the shorter Yellow Badge version of The Knowledge,

because it would take less time than the Green Badge. In terms of managing this occupation boundary crossing, he and his wife rescheduled their respective working hours to enable him to have time to study. His wife increased her working hours to full-time, whilst he reduced his minicab hours to part-time. This enabled him to study for The Knowledge, as well as help to look after their children.

After two years, Neil successfully obtained his Yellow Badge, which he acknowledged as a challenging process, but also a significant personal achievement:

> *I never realised how much work it was, but really if you knew, if you put that effort into something like this then it's for a huge reward.*

He decided to work on a sole trader basis so that he could control his working hours, basing himself primarily at a local taxi rank in the London suburb where he lived. In terms of personal career boundaries, he worked flexible hours in order to continue to help with childcare commitments. He also described enjoying working with local customers, some of whom he got to know well as regular clients:

> *I think if you're a taxi driver you haven't got any work colleagues like in an office, so your customers are everything.*

Additionally, he explained that completing his Yellow Badge then '*gave me the back-up to try for other things, to go for the Green Badge*.' The final stages of his career narrative explained his plans after completing the Green Badge. He perceived this as the culmination of his career advancement in the trade, but also hoped that the associated higher income would enable him and his wife to both work part-time and spend more time together as a family. In reflecting back on his experiences, he concluded that:

> *At the beginning when I came out of the print and the way things went, I felt really that everything was very unjust. But after all this time now I sort of think it was a blessing, which I never would have thought.*

In describing the collapse of the print trade and the loss of work that he was skilled at and enjoyed, Neil constructed a highly regressive plotline shift initially

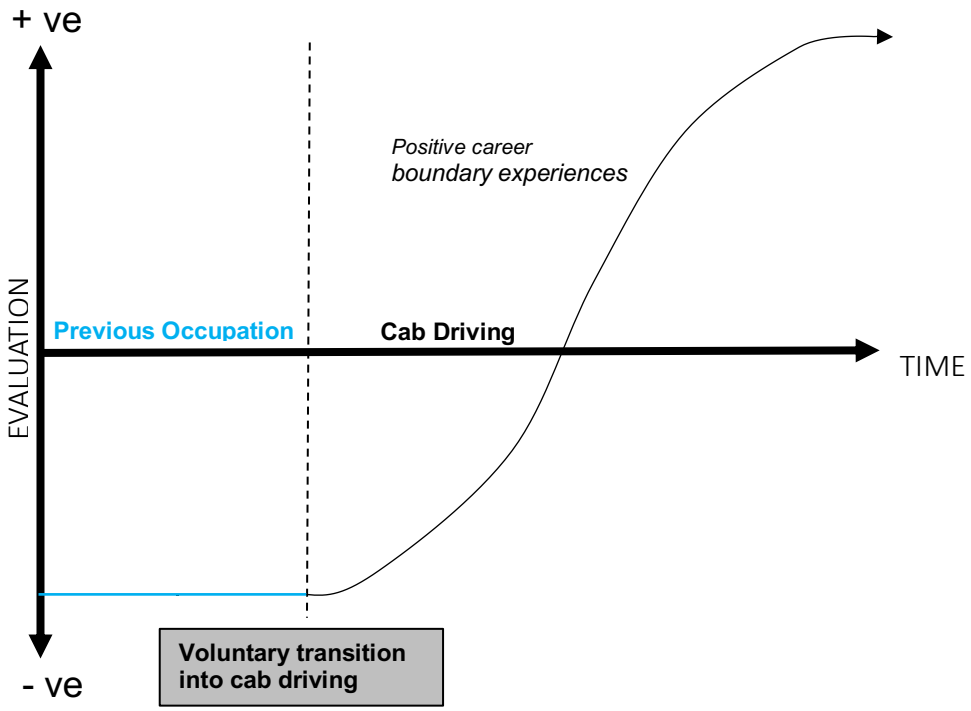
and a reluctant move into cab driving work. However, as his narrative progressed the plotline advanced again as he recounted gaining his Yellow Badge, doing a job that he enjoyed and fitted around his caring responsibilities. Furthermore, there was a sense of career advancement, as he transitioned from minicab driving, to obtaining his Yellow Badge and finally the Green Badge.

7.4.3 'Salvation' Career Narrative

These narratives interpreted crossing the occupation boundary into cab driving as welcome salvation from what individuals themselves perceived as work in relatively low status occupations (Figure 7.7). This included care work, factory work, retail work and couriering. The early stages of these narratives all recounted struggling to engage at school, leaving with few qualifications and finding it difficult to identify any preferred career route. Instead, individuals described taking up any local work that they heard about via family and friends, or that they were offered via local employment agencies. However, at the same time they expressed frustration with this work, ranging from boredom, to low pay and few career development opportunities. Subsequently crossing the occupation boundary into cab driving was then interpreted as advancing over a status threshold into a better paid and higher status occupation. Furthermore, over time individuals perceived other key boundaries as enabling their career. This included finding a job and organisation of choice, to specialising in work with customers that they liked and appreciating their flexible contractual status.

Three participants constructed this particular type of narrative. One had transitioned from care work (Driver 11), whilst another had been a motorcycle courier (Driver 31). In both instances, they perceived these prior occupations as poorly paid, dirty and low status work. Crossing the occupation boundary into cab driving was then perceived as advancement into higher status work. In a similar way, a third participant transitioned from a series of ad hoc and low status jobs (Driver 22) and the nature of his progressive 'Salvation' career narrative is discussed here:

Figure 7.7 'Salvation' Career Narrative



‘Salvation’ Exemplar: Justin (Driver 22)

Justin’s career narrative opened with him recounting playing truant regularly throughout secondary school and leaving at the age of 16 without any qualifications. In terms of his early working life, he undertook a variety of jobs for several years including door-to-door sales, factory work, farm labouring and office cleaning. By the age of 19 his first daughter was born and he began working night shifts at a local fast food shop, because this enabled him and his partner to share childcare responsibilities. He had difficulty earning a living wage though and was often bored with the highly repetitive nature of his work, which he described retrospectively as a ‘*ridiculous, rubbish job.’*

A friend then suggested applying for vacancies at the cab firm where he was employed, which appealed as potentially better paid work. However, when he visited that company, he realised that he couldn’t afford to pay the upfront cab licensing costs. Instead, the manager offered him a call handler job that he accepted, with a view to applying for a taxi license once he had sufficient funds. Working as a call handler for a year then offered Justin a chance to find out about the cab trade and build up a social network of cab drivers. When one of the taxi drivers who was leaving the occupation offered his vehicle at a discount price, Justin took out a loan to purchase it and pay for his licensing costs. He described finally crossing the occupation boundary into cab driving work as straightforward because of his contacts in the trade:

> *I found it dead, dead easy at that point. My guv made sure the car was OK, all me forms were right before I sent them off. And the drivers here told me exactly what I had to do to pass the tests. So there I was a taxi driver, a proper job.*

His narrative continued in a progressive fashion, as his key boundary experiences facilitated the achievement of some additional personal career goals. He described planning to stay with the same cab firm because ‘*I like it here, they all know me and I know them.’* The only job transition he had made was to cross the boundary from night to day work after several years:

> *I do days now. I think it’s hard work at nights, especially as you get older, it messes your body up.*

In terms of income, he acknowledged that cab driving was not necessarily a highly paid occupation, but appreciated the flexibility of earning cash in hand:

> *I don't earn a fortune, but I make a living and the cash… I like the ready cash.*

Additionally, he had built up a close rapport with longstanding customers who he regarded as akin to friends:

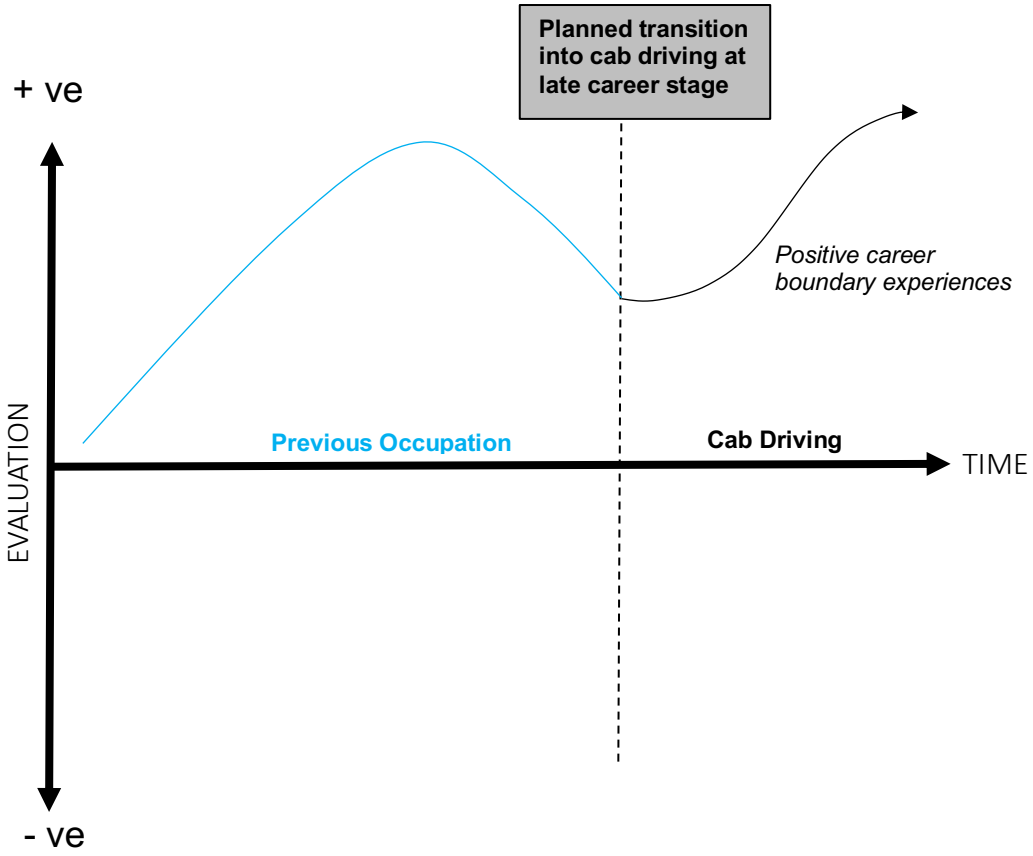
> *Sometimes you can't wait to get the next instalment of their life. So you think 'Oh I'm going to go and pick so and so up.' And I can't wait to see them, catch up with what's going on with them this week, see how they are.*

In Justin's career narrative, crossing the occupation into cab driving was interpreted as marking a step-up into a better paid, more interesting and higher status occupation. Additionally, whilst he opted to remain working as a taxi driver with the same company, he was able to switch from night to day shifts when it suited him to do so. Unlike his earlier work experiences, cab driving also offered him opportunities to earn a living wage to support his family and build rewarding social relationships with his customers.

7.4.4 'Final' Career Narrative

A defining feature of this progressive career narrative involved crossing the occupation boundary into cab driving as a final career move prior to retirement (Figure 7.8). In these instances, individuals transitioned into the trade aged in their 50s or beyond, with a view to this being the final stage of their working life. In each case, this was a planful move and included spending time investigating cab driving work beforehand, in order to identify a job and organisation of choice from the outset. Furthermore, the potential flexibility of working hours was attractive, with the option to work part-time from the outset, or as they approached retirement and wished to reduce their hours.

Figure 7.8 ‘Final’ Career Narrative



Three participants constructed this form of narrative. One had worked initially in administration and sales roles, before going on to become a lorry driver, but had made a final transition into cab driving work because it enabled him to work within his home locality (Driver 04). Another participant was taking up work as a black cab driver at the time of interview, after a long-term career in the police force, in order to keep himself busy and top-up his pension money (Driver 16). Two other participants had come into the trade in their 50s as cab drivers with a view to running a taxi business as a final career project (Driver 17; Driver 19). The nature of Driver 17's progressive 'Final' career narrative is discussed here:

'Final' Exemplar: Carol (Driver 17)

Carol's career narrative recounted leaving school aged 16 to become an apprentice hairdresser and then going on to set up and manage her own hairdressing business for over thirty years. However, she began to feel bored with the work by her early 50s, which prompted her to look around for alternative work as a final stage of her career:

> *I was so sick and tired of hairdressing, so I thought 'Oh, I'll do something else.' And my husband was looking down the paper one day… and he said 'Oh there's a cab driving thing here and you like driving.'*

She went on to apply for this job and crossed the occupation boundary into a taxi driver role for a local cab firm, with a view to buying out the owner if she enjoyed the work. Carol described gaining her taxi driver license as '*pretty straightforward,'* opting to rent a vehicle whilst she ascertained whether or not to stay longer-term in the trade. She worked part-time as a cab driver initially and at that stage was only one of a handful of female cab drivers in her locality:

> *When I first started there was just me and only a couple of other women out there and we did get a bit of stick. But it's got better and there's quite a lot of women out there now, especially as a lot of lady customers…. they like a lady driver.*

After a year as a taxi driver, she went ahead and bought out the owner of the taxi company that she was working for. She then also went on to take over a second small, local cab firm which she integrated into her existing company.

She did so because by this time her children had left home, she had sold her hairdressing business and wanted to develop a cab company as a final career project. She retained her taxi driving license and continued to drive on a part-time basis for the company herself. Whilst this involved a demanding schedule managing 15 staff, she described preferring to be busy and opting to work hours that suited her:

> *I'm usually in the office at half past 5 in the morning, Monday to Friday. And then I… well I get things sorted out. Go on the desk until the call handlers come in at 8 o'clock. So, I've got me school runs sorted and me drivers are in, them as wants to be. And then I'm obviously shunting cars around if they're going for a service and picking up customers here and there. So, I'm busy all day but then I'll knock off about half 3… 4 o'clock.*

During the ten years that she had been running the company, she had also taken on her husband and daughter as taxi drivers and expressed pride at it being a family business. In terms of the cab driver/customer boundary, she also described enjoying a close rapport with her regular customer base and regarded herself as a key community carer:

> *And with my hairdressing, I was like the social worker as well, you know. If families couldn't help them out, then I was running around doing the shopping, doing everything. And the same as what you do in this industry… you get to know your customers and you help them out.*

Her career narrative concluded with future plans that involved cutting down to part-time hours and gradually handing over the business to her daughter within the next few years:

> *I want to retire at some point!*

This participant was one of three women in the sample group who all described being able to readily cross the occupation boundary into cab driving, enjoyed working in the trade and engaged closely with their customers. Additionally, she drew on her entrepreneurial and management skills from the hairdressing sector to buy out and successfully develop her own cab firm. In doing so, her account highlighted how some business owners employ relatives and for inter-

generational cab driving careers to evolve. This career narrative also illustrated the potential to move into a part-time role as a bridging career into retirement.

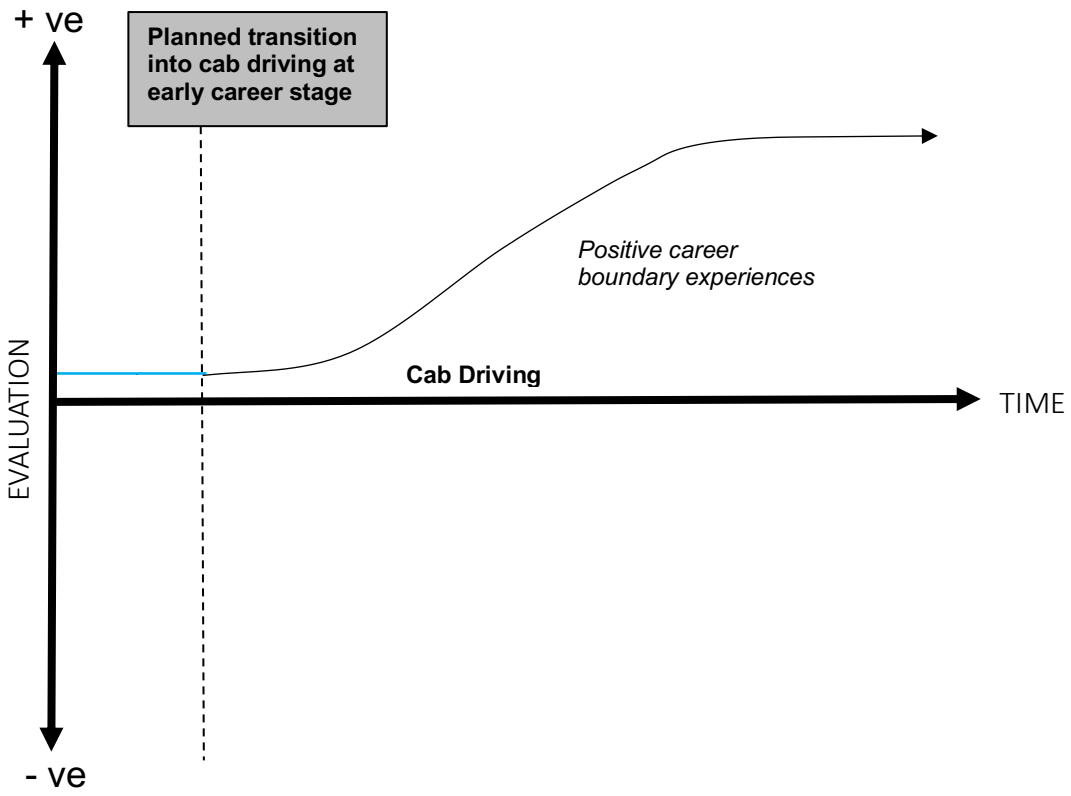
7.4.5 'Lifelong' Career Narrative

The defining feature of these career narratives was that individuals took up cab driving with a view to constructing a lifelong career in the trade (Figure 7.9). Individuals had all crossed the occupation boundary into the trade by their mid 20s. Two of the participants in this category had followed their fathers into cab driving, one initially as a minicab driver (Driver 15) and the other as a London black cab driver (Driver 14). Another had worked since his early 20s for his uncle's minicab firm where he was happily settled and planned to stay long-term (Driver 27). A third participant had started minicab driving in his mid 20s and planned to cross the boundary into a taxi driving role and purchase his own car (Driver 32). Finally, two participants had worked as cab drivers for over 40 years in the trade (Driver 06; Driver 09). They had both entered the trade as minicab drivers, but went on to cross job and career boundaries that they perceived as status hierarchies, akin to a skilled occupation. Additionally, over the years they had built up a close rapport with regular customers, as well as managed the work/life boundary to accommodate changing family circumstances over time. The career boundary experiences of Driver 06 and the nature of his progressive 'Lifelong' career narrative are explored here:

'Lifelong' Exemplar: Barry (Driver 06)

In the opening stages of his career narrative, Barry described leaving school at the age of 16 to undertake an aircraft engineering apprenticeship. However, two years after completing that training he became frustrated with long periods of unpaid strike action in the sector and decided to find more secure employment. He therefore went on to work for a year as a milkman, but wanted a higher income and took the advice of a friend to join him in the cab trade as a taxi driver. He crossed the occupation boundary at the age of 23 and recalled the process as a simple one, including the local knowledge test at that time:

Figure 7.9 'Lifelong' Career Narrative



> *She asked 'Do you know where the football ground was?' Which was great for me because I did so I said 'Yes!' So then she said 'And do you know where the railway station is?' Well I'd arrived at the station that morning, so I said 'Yes!' And then she said 'Can you get from the station to the football ground?' and I thought I could work it out so I said 'Yes!' And then she said 'OK that's your knowledge.'*

He began working initially for a local taxi company as a commission driver, because he didn't own a car of his own, but then recounted crossing a series of job and organisation boundaries within the trade:

> *I changed it from doing days and nights, to doing all days and then on me own.*

He decided to transition entirely to day shifts as a result of suffering a series of physical assaults by customers on night shifts. He also became frustrated with working for somebody else, because of what he perceived as poor customer care at that organisation. After several years, he therefore decided to set up his own company and buy his own vehicle. As a sole trader, he began to take on local customers by word of mouth which he much preferred:

> *I like working for myself, being my own boss. Nobody really tells me what to do, where to go. I just… I look after my customers, so I like that.*

He described it taking several years to build up a customer base and money being very tight initially as a result. However, once he had a family, he appreciated the flexibility of working for himself and was able to manage the work/life boundary effectively:

> *I've got time to go and walk the dog, pick the kids up from school. I took two of them to school this morning before I came here. I've got quality time with the kids.*

In terms of managing the cab driver/customer boundary, Barry's career narrative included detailed anecdotes about his clients, who ranged from elderly local customers to business clients. This included many repeat customers who he had come to know well over the years: *They're friends. They're friends and customers, you know?* Additionally, he described proactively researching new business clients in order to help strike up a good rapport when he met them for the first time:

Some of them have got very interesting trades and I talk to them all about what they're doing. I can hold a conversation with all of them. Usually when I collect somebody who's a stranger I will go on the internet and look them up at their company. Who is so and so? I'll google it, so I know what they're doing and I can talk to them.

In the final stages of his career narrative, Barry expressed pride in having progressed in the trade by moving on from working for someone else, to building his own cab driving business. Furthermore, he regarded cab driving as skilled work and had a strong sense of positive professional identify:

I'm not overly intelligent, but I am a professional driver.

This career narrative therefore illustrated the potential to perceive career advancement within the cab driving trade, akin to the notion of a traditional hierarchical career. Furthermore, whilst Barry identified challenges with building a cab driving business from scratch, his narrative progressed to highlight crafting the cab driver/customer boundary to ensure a high level of customer rapport, as well as achieving a positive work/life balance through controlling his own working hours.

7.4.6 Summary

These progressive career narratives stood in marked contrast to the way in which low-skilled employment has been characterised typically as problematic work. Across this set of narratives, individuals identified both voluntary and involuntary occupation boundary crossings into cab driving work, which all went on to resolve ultimately as progressive plotlines. For some participants, transitioning into cab driving work was a pragmatic decision, based on having access to usefully flexible employment, or a basic income whilst establishing another business venture. These narratives also highlighted the potential for individuals to enter this occupation at different life stages and from varied occupation backgrounds. In doing so they went on to construct cab driving as anything from a second career, to salvation from low status work, a final career and even a lifelong career. In each case, individuals were able to engage with critical career boundaries in order to construct a satisfying career. These included crossing boundaries into jobs and work of choice, as well as perceiving

a sense of career advancement in doing so. Furthermore, over time individuals were increasingly able to build a positive rapport with customers and manage the cab driving work/life boundary effectively.

7.5 Conclusion

The findings set out in this chapter highlight how the five salient career boundaries associated with cab driving collectively shaped the construction of different types of career narrative. The regressive narratives confirm how low-skilled work such as cab driving can be experienced by some as highly problematic. This was illustrated by career narratives in which individuals perceived themselves as trapped in work of last resort, or alternatively planned to leave within a year. Here, occupation and intra-occupation career boundaries restricted career mobility, leaving individuals negatively embedded in cab driving work roles. Furthermore, individuals often struggled to manage personal career boundaries as well. Some from ethnic minority backgrounds described particular problems with marginalisation in the labour market, a sense of demotion into the cab driving trade, as well as overt racism impacting upon their ability to build customer rapport. In contrast, the cyclical career narratives highlighted how some individuals enter and leave the cab driving trade multiple times. Here individuals ricocheted between perceiving cab driving career boundaries as constraining or enabling their career. Finally, progressive career narratives identified how positive career boundary experiences may arise. This extended beyond appreciating flexible work arrangements, to perceiving cab driving as salvation from lower status work, a second career following redundancy or ill health, a useful career in the run-up to retirement or a satisfying, lifelong career.

The exemplars themselves identified in more detail the complex and nuanced way in which career boundary experiences shaped the particular type of career narratives that individuals constructed. They identified how prior work/life experiences might not only shape personal career goals over time, but also impact upon the personal resources and career capital that individuals brought to managing key career boundary processes. In crossing the occupation boundary at different ages and career stages, individuals also identified different

motivations for entering the cab driving trade. Furthermore, they faced varied personal demands in terms of the level of income they needed to earn, as well as their preferred scheduling of work hours and the extent to which they wished to build a sense of rapport with customers. As a result, whilst for some cab driving represented highly problematic work of last resort, others constructed agentic narratives of negotiating, crafting and crossing key boundaries to construct a career of choice.

CHAPTER 8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Introduction

The results of this thesis overturn prevailing assumptions about low-skilled work as careerless, by demonstrating how career boundaries shape the construction of a rich, diverse array of cab driving careers. This contribution resulted from applying a novel conceptual lens, comprised of contemporary notions of career as both a narrative (Young & Popadiuk, 2012) and a boundary crossing phenomenon (Inkson et al., 2012). Unlike more fragmented approaches, this enabled a comprehensive examination of low-skilled cab driving careers over both time and social space. Cab drivers' career narratives were analysed using thematic and plotline methods, in order to identify the nature and role of the career boundaries that shaped them. This approach sought to address the following research questions:

How are cab drivers' career narratives shaped by career boundaries?
1. Which career boundaries do cab drivers identify as salient in their career narratives?
2. Why do cab drivers perceive these career boundaries as salient?
3. What type of career narrative do cab drivers construct about their career boundary experiences?

This final chapter begins by critically interpreting the findings associated with each research question in the context of the career literature. The discussion then draws on these interpretations to identify key contributions to knowledge and their implications, which can be summarised as follows:

In terms of career theory, the study offers three key contributions. First, it refutes assumptions of low-skilled work environments as featureless social landscapes devoid of career opportunities. Instead, the findings illustrate the central role that multiple career boundaries play in shaping cab driving careers, from defining work domains and associated status hierarchies, to differentiating relationships with customers, as well as the wider life context. Second, it provides novel insights into variations in low-skilled careers, even within a single occupation, by illustrating how an individual's boundary experiences shape career narratives ranging from cab driving as a last resort, to a sustainable and meaningful career. Third, the conceptual lens itself offers a novel means of investigating the complexities of contemporary subjective careers in both low and high-skill settings.

From a career policy and practice perspective, the thesis highlights the need to give credence to both the career challenges and opportunities that this sector offers, as well as identifying more effective ways to help clients evaluate their options.

Finally, this study makes a methodological contribution by strengthening best practice approaches in narrative research. It does this by developing a more systematic approach to narrative plotline analysis, as well as strengthening guidelines for drawing on counselling supervision to improve ethical research practice.

Having considered these contributions to knowledge and their implications, the chapter goes on to examine how the results, in conjunction with the acknowledged limitations of this study, can inform future career research. This is followed by a short personal reflection about the research process. The final section then sets out key conclusions that can be drawn from this thesis.

8.2 Interpreting the Findings

This opening stage of this discussion summarises the key findings of the thesis and examines how they relate to existing career theory and empirical research.

The aim here is to establish the ways in which the study addresses gaps in knowledge by considering the extent to which it supports, challenges and extends our understanding of how careers are constructed in a low-skilled setting. It reviews each of the research questions set out above and the results associated with them, in the context of key bodies of literature identified at the outset of this thesis including the subjective career, career narratives and career boundaries.

8.2.1 Career Narratives Shaped by Career Boundaries

This thesis set out with the overarching aim of understanding better how individuals in a low-skilled occupation construct a career. This is an often neglected topic (Mattijssen et al., 2020) and the career field offers no convincing justification for the situation. Many conceptualisations of career have expanded to acknowledge all working lives including those undertaken in low-skilled settings (Inkson et al., 2015). Philosophical developments have resulted in understanding career as both an objective and subjective phenomenon, opening up new ways to examine how individuals themselves interpret careers in all work environments (Young & Collin, 2004). Sporadic studies have even hinted at the potential for complex subjective careers to be constructed in the low-skilled sector (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004; Hebson, 2015; Hennequin, 2007). Despite these developments though, research effort continues to prioritise the career experiences of a skilled elite (Brown, 2016). As a result, the low-skilled sector remains at best neglected and at worst dismissed as devoid of career opportunities (Duffy et al., 2016).

However, this thesis refutes notions of low-skilled work as universally problematic and careerless by identifying a rich array of career experiences amongst cab drivers. These results were achieved by using a novel conceptual lens to examine how individuals subjectively interpret transitioning into and working in cab driving. This approach argues that individuals across the labour market, including cab drivers, will construct a career narrative that is shaped by career boundaries. Taking this approach identified that cab drivers construct different types of careers as a result of perceiving multiple career boundaries in

different ways. A common set of occupation, intra-occupation and personal boundaries was identified as salient in every cab driver's career narrative. However, individuals perceived these career boundaries in different ways, depending upon personal preference, as well as their career/life stage and social and economic circumstances. As a result, salient boundaries were regarded as anything from problematic barriers restricting career choice and mobility, to phenomena that could be negotiated and crafted to construct meaningful careers. These different interpretations then shaped career narratives ranging from regressive accounts of cab driving as a last resort career, to cyclical accounts of transitioning in and out of the industry, as well as progressive accounts of rewarding careers. The conceptual lens employed in this study therefore provided a means of not only classifying different types of cab driving career experiences, but also understanding how these variations arose.

The results summarised here lay to rest any idea that only individuals in elite settings construct careers worthy of study. Instead, they demonstrate how a fascinating, complex array of diverse careers can be identified even within a single low-skilled occupation such as cab driving. In doing so, this thesis highlights the importance of investigating subjective career experiences beyond the skilled sector. From an objective perspective, cab driving career pathways appear flat and uniform, limited to either an anonymous cab driving role or progression into management (People 1st, 2016). Certainly, some individuals only perceived more formless pathways akin to job-hopping (Butler & Hammer, 2019). However, others identified boundary crossing routes that culminated in becoming positively embedded in a specialist cab driving job and/or preferred organisation (Ng & Feldman, 2007). Some even regarded intra-occupation boundaries as status thresholds demarcating a hierarchical career ladder (Thomas, 1989). In terms of objective career success, cab driving appeared to offer few opportunities for substantive pay rises, or promotions (Dries, 2011). However, whilst some cab drivers construed career boundaries as stumbling blocks to fulfilling material career goals (Hennequin, 2007), others perceived opportunities to negotiate relational or work/life boundaries to their personal satisfaction. Finally, boundaries differentiated key career domains and thereby offered a means of constructing identity (Hernes, 2004), resulting in either

negative perceptions of cab driving as a low-status role, to positive interpretations of working as professional cab driver. This thesis therefore builds on our understanding of different facets of the subjective career in a low-skilled setting and their complex nature.

Finally, the results of this study highlight the importance of giving credence to the notion of a subjective career in all work settings. Objective conceptualisations of career as hierarchical advancement have proved persistent, even in the 21st century (Barnes et al., 2016). Ideas about the subjective career have opened up new avenues of research though, particularly in the context of skilled work (Gunz et al., 2020). However, some caution still prevails in acknowledging subjective careers in low-skilled settings, particularly where individuals express satisfaction with their work experiences. For example, Jones et al. (2017, p. 146) have argued that care needs to be taken in assessing whether subjective interpretations of low-skilled work experiences reflect 'tolerance or preference.' In a similar way, Hebson et al. (2015, p. 317) have suggested that low-skilled workers who express satisfaction with their careers may simply be 'making the best of a bad job.' Dismissing such interpretations out-of-hand though risks perpetuating traditional assumptions about low-skilled work. Instead, the findings from this study highlight the importance of investigating low-skilled work experiences from a subjective career perspective in order to understand better the rich diversity of ways in which they may be interpreted.

8.2.2 Core Set of Salient Career Boundaries

The first stage of thematic analysis identified a core set of five salient career boundaries common to all cab driving career narratives. These were the occupation, intra-occupation (job, organisation) and personal (cab driver/customer, work/life) boundaries. This contrasts with prevailing literature that has identified how boundaries can restrict access to skilled occupations (Ituma & Simpson, 2009) but presumed that boundaries play a negligible role within the low-skilled sector itself (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2014). However, the results of this study match findings from the skilled sector, where

there is increasing recognition that ‘a set of multiple & coexisting boundaries’ is central to shaping a career (Rodrigues & Guest, 2010, p. 1162). Within skilled occupations, empirical studies have highlighted sets of salient boundaries that include some or all of those delimiting occupation, job, organisation, industry, work/life and geographic domains (Bagdadli et al., 2003; Gubler et al., 2014; Gunz et al., 2002; Rodrigues et al., 2016). These show substantial overlap with the types of key boundaries identified by cab drivers, which suggests that the careers of both low and high-skill workers are shaped in part by similar types of boundaries.

However, the findings also highlight differences between boundaries identified as salient by cab drivers, in comparison to skilled workers. For example, relational boundaries have been largely ignored in discussions of contemporary career boundaries. This study highlights the importance attributed to the cab driver/customer boundary though, reflecting that face-to-face social interactions with customers form a key part of daily work (People 1st, 2016). In another distinction, the geographic boundary was not identified as important in this thesis. Local government licensing district boundaries require cab drivers to engage only with local employers and customers, arguably embedding them within that geographic boundary. However, few participants expressed any desire to relocate geographically, akin to Gubler et al.’s (2014) ‘Stay-puts.’ Those that had made a geographic move reported finding it easy to be relicensed elsewhere, as they were already familiar with the industry. Cab driving was therefore available as a career option both close to home and further afield and in this sense cab drivers themselves attributed little importance to geographic boundaries. The differences in salient boundaries identified here therefore support Rodrigues et al.’s (2016) proposal that each occupation population will discern a unique set of core boundaries that reflects the particular nature of their work.

The results also identify more complex cab driving career boundaries than the literature has accounted for in low-skilled settings. Cab drivers perceived multiple pathways into cab driving, akin to occupation boundaries in the skilled sector that provide initial access to a variety of jobs and organisations (Gunz et al., 2007). An unexpected array of localised job and organisation boundaries

was also identified, discernible only to those within the cab driving industry. This builds on limited empirical research that has identified subtle intra-occupation boundaries, acknowledged only by employers and individuals working within a low-skilled occupation (Lucas & Buzanell, 2004). Far from being undifferentiated work, these career boundaries circumscribed specialist jobs and different organisation types, thereby giving structure and form to cab driving in a similar fashion to boundaries in the skilled sector (Rodrigues et al., 2016). Cab drivers also defined their relationship with customers as anything from a fleeting engagement, to crossing boundaries into relationships akin to friendship and family, akin to the complexity of client relationships in skilled settings (Buttle & Maklan, 2015). Finally, complex work/life boundary scenarios were identified, as individuals sought to achieve preferred degrees of balance between these two domains, just as skilled workers do (De Araujo et al., 2015).

Additionally, the findings align with skilled sector experiences where individuals construe boundaries as salient across different dimensions including permeability, durability and flexibility (Rodrigues et al., 2016). A low-skilled occupation boundary is regarded typically as highly permeable because of minimal education entry requirements (Guest & Rodrigues, 2014). However, many cab drivers expressed concern about increasing career boundary codification, which can raise potential for an occupation boundary to act as an entry barrier (Parker & Arthur, 2000). In terms of the intra-occupation boundaries, boundary durability was construed as a particularly salient issue that impacted upon career mobility experiences (King et al., 2005). So, whilst the demise of a cab driving job or organisation boundary triggered some enforced transitions, others described becoming embedded for years within long-standing intra-occupation boundaries (Ng & Feldman, 2007). However, flexibility was a key dimension in the context of personal boundaries. Here there were notable variations in terms of the extent to which individuals were able to manage the work/life boundary (Piszczek & Berg, 2014) or craft the relational boundary with customers to their satisfaction (Nielson & Abildgaard, 2012). Different boundary dimensions therefore proved more salient than others, depending on the types of career boundary, as well as each cab drivers' particular career preference and circumstances.

So, whilst it has been presumed in the literature that the low-skilled sector is a largely formless social space, the results from this study show that cab drivers perceive it to be structured by multiple boundaries that are salient in shaping their careers. Moreover, they perceive these career boundaries as complex, multi-dimensioned phenomena that shape their careers in different ways.

8.2.3 Perceptions of Career Boundaries

Whilst a core set of salient boundaries were recognised by all cab drivers, the thematic analysis also showed that individuals perceived them to be important in many different ways. Negative perceptions arose when cab drivers lacked social and economic resources to make preferred transitions across the occupation and intra-occupation boundaries. This challenges assumptions that boundaries play a negligible part in constraining career choices (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2014) by illustrating how some cab drivers perceived boundaries as barriers to career mobility. Others struggled to manage personal boundaries such as the work/life boundary to their satisfaction, for example by working excessive hours, just as some skilled workers do (Kreiner et al., 2009). Some were also vulnerable to breaches of the cab driver/customer boundary, through verbal and physical abuse, which caused great anxiety and distress. These findings illustrate how some career boundaries were regarded as highly problematic by some cab drivers.

At the same time, there were examples of boundaries being perceived positively in the context of the career narratives. This is interesting as much less attention has been given to the enabling capacity of career boundaries, even within the skilled sector (Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2018). The analysis illustrated that in differentiating specialist roles and acting as status thresholds, the occupation and intra-occupation boundaries provided reference points that demarcated career pathways in a similar way to skilled settings (Kovalenko & Mortelmans, 2014; Vinkenberg & Weber, 2012). Some also achieved a preferred work/life balance through exploiting flexible employment contracts (Guest et al., 2006). Finally, the results support a small body of work that shows how by recrafting the relational boundary with customers to that of a therapist, friend or family,

some cab drivers were able to derive considerable satisfaction in their daily work (Wrzesniewskil & Dutton, 2001). Acknowledging the potential for boundaries to play an enabling role in low-skilled work is therefore key to understanding positive career experiences in a low-skilled occupation such as cab driving.

The findings suggest that a complex variety of factors underpin whether individuals perceive career boundaries constraining or enabling their career, just as they do in the skilled sector (Rodrigues et al., 2016). Within cab driving, the factors identified in this study include personal circumstances such as vocational preferences. For example, some participants derived great satisfaction from being out on the road in their cab employing practical driving skills, just as others have reported in the transport sector (People 1st, 2016). However, others prioritised building rewarding relationships with clients in a similar way to those in occupations such as social care (Skills for Care, 2007). Life stage issues were also important, underpinning issues such as preferences for flexible work arrangements to fit around family responsibilities (Kreiner et al., 2009), or a reassessment of career priorities as retirement approached (Furunes et al., 2015). The extent to which participants had access to economic and social resources also impacted on how they regarded key boundaries. For example, those without sufficient financial resources to purchase cab licenses, vehicles or the extended training for The Knowledge perceived some cab driving career boundaries as impassable (People 1st, 2016). In a similar way, limited social networks meant that some cab drivers lacked family, friends or colleagues to help understand licensing processes or finding jobs (Higgins, 2001). This complex array of factors resulted in individual cab drivers perceiving career boundaries in very different ways.

These varied perceptions meant that it was difficult to identify any particular group within cab driving that was most likely to struggle with working in this occupation. For example, those from ethnic minority group backgrounds were clearly vulnerable to humiliating racial abuse and this caused some participants great distress. However, there were other ethnic minority participants who had devised highly effective strategies for managing customers and reported fewer problems overall than some of their white counterparts. Of course, it is also

possible that these individuals were so accustomed to dealing with racism in their daily lives that they did not even consider raising this issue as part of their career narratives (Stafford & Peterson, 2007). Some of those from ethnic minority backgrounds also lacked social and economic resources to assist with boundary management, particularly more recent migrants (Migrant Advisory Committee, 2018). However, others had relatives who had set up cab driving firms and offered them work, so their family networks assisted them with accessing the industry. Cultural issues therefore played a significant part in some ethnic minority cab drivers having substantial problems constructing meaningful careers, but the picture was not entirely clear-cut.

It was a similarly complicated picture from the perspective of other social groups within cab driving. Some of the long-term unemployed and those with health issues certainly lacked the social and economic resources to enable them to navigate career boundaries associated with cab driving (Blustein et al., 2013; Williams & Mavin, 2015). However, for others taking up cab driving was a welcome opportunity to build a new career following unemployment, or to access a more sedentary occupation which enabled them to continue working in spite of health problems. Whether individuals worked as minicab, taxi or black cab drivers also had a mixed impact on career experiences. Some individuals did struggle with working in what they perceived as low status minicab driving roles, whilst others enjoyed what they regarded as the more professional status of being a black cab driver. However, some minicab and taxi drivers constructed progressive career narratives, whilst some black cab drivers did not, reflecting wider issues with managing career boundaries in the industry. Gender issues appeared to play little part in terms of impacting upon career experiences though, with women in this study expressing both similar frustrations and rewarding experiences to their male counterparts. This may reflect efforts that the industry has made to encourage women in England to take-up cab driving, so that their increasing numbers mean that they are more widely accepted (People 1st, 2016).

Investigating why cab drivers perceived each of the five key career boundaries as salient in shaping their careers therefore uncovered a further layer of complex processes. Whilst some cab drivers perceived a particular type of

career boundary as a problematic constraint, others regarded it enabling their career. Furthermore, an array of different factors underpinned these different perceptions, including vocational preferences, career/life stage and economic and social resources.

8.2.4 Types of Career Narratives

Following the thematic analysis, a second stage of plotline analysis was used to examine what types of career narratives cab drivers constructed about their career boundary experiences. This process identified a wide array of regressive (Last Resort, Fleeting), cyclical (Recurrent) and progressive (Means to an End, Second Chance, Salvation, Final, Lifelong) career narrative types.

The regressive narratives constructed cab driving as a 'Last Resort' or 'Fleeting' career, reflecting prevailing views about the low-skilled sector as problematic work (D'Arcy et al., 2017). These bleak accounts highlighted challenges with making an enforced demotion into cab driving, as well as struggles with undertaking poorly paid and unrewarding work. Beyond this though, an unexpected variety of cyclical and progressive career narratives were identified. The cyclical accounts of cab driving as 'Recurrent' are consistent with career narratives in which individuals transition repeatedly in and out of a skilled profession (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2011). In a similar way, the progressive narratives can be mapped against findings from the skilled sector. The 'Means to an End' narratives illustrate how an occupation can be valued for its flexibility (Tomlinson et al., 2018), whilst the 'Second Chance' and 'Salvation' narratives mirror mid-life career transitions undertaken in the skilled sector (Peake & McDowall, 2012). The 'Final' career narratives show how cab driving can be perceived as a useful retirement option (Furunes et al., 2015) and the 'Lifelong' accounts are akin to traditional notions of a hierarchical career (Mooney et al., 2016). Far from uniform experiences of cab driving, these findings illustrate that whilst cab drivers encountered a common set of career boundaries, they wove complex and very different narratives about their personal experiences. Furthermore, many of the different types of narratives that they constructed align with skilled sector careers.

These considerable variations in career narrative types reflect a complex interplay between an individual's unfolding career boundary experiences. In particular, whilst each of the five key boundaries were perceived as salient by all cab drivers, some were more influential than others in shaping particular types of narrative. The role of the occupation boundary is considered here first, followed by the intra-occupation and personal boundaries encountered once cab drivers had entered the industry.

8.2.4.1 Occupation Boundary

A key issue shaping the type of career narrative concerned the particular career stage at which the occupation boundary was crossed. This occurred at an early stage in the 'Lifelong' career narratives. Whilst taking up cab driving was not necessarily the initial school-to-work transition (Nathan & Hill, 2006), it took place within a few years of leaving full-time education and after undertaking only one or two prior work roles. However, crossing the occupation boundary took the form of a mid-career transition in the 'Last resort,' 'Salvation' and 'Second Chance' career narratives. Such experiences align with career transition models which identify the potential for substantive, mid-career occupation transitions to arise during the course of working life (Blau, 2007). In the 'Final' career narratives though, participants crossed the occupation boundary at a late career stage. Here cab driving was perceived as bridge employment that was accessible in later life, as well as being usefully sedentary work (Beehr & Bennett, 2014). This is another important finding, because whilst bridge employment has been identified as a late stage career route in studies of older skilled workers (Gobeski et al., 2009), it is not often acknowledged in the career literature as a phenomenon associated with the low-skilled sector. Specific experiences of taking up cab driving work at different career stages can therefore be mapped against career theory and empirical studies rooted in the skilled sector.

Another chronological issue impacting upon the type of career narrative concerned the length of time that cab drivers remained within the occupation boundary. Working in this occupation was sometimes constructed as short-term

employment, exemplifying a traditional conceptualisation of low-skilled work as job-hopping (Thomas, 1989). For example, the regressive 'Fleeting' career narratives were characterised by individuals transitioning into cab driving at any career stage, but then leaving within a year. However, the cyclical 'Recurrent' career narratives highlight the potential for individuals to move repeatedly in and out of cab driving at different career/life stages. The notion of job-hopping has typically included a presumption that individuals can transition readily from one low-skilled occupation to another (Brown, 2016), but not identified the potential to return repeatedly to the familiarity of a prior occupation. In a further variation, participants constructed progressive 'Means to an End' narratives, including examples of taking up cab driving on a short-term basis to generate income whilst setting up a small business. This provides valuable support for limited empirical research that suggests working in a low-skilled occupation may be perceived not as a career in its own right, but rather a short-term means of achieving desired career outcomes in the longer-term (Alberti, 2014; Hardy & Sanders, 2015). These career narratives collectively illustrate how cab driving sometimes unfolded as a temporary career transition, rather than a permanent one.

In addition to chronological positioning, the way in which individuals evaluated crossing the occupation boundary in the context of their broader career and life experiences also shaped the type of career narrative. In particular, whilst some made voluntary transitions across the occupation boundary into cab driving, others perceived this as an enforced crossing. These involuntary crossings were then constructed from the outset as a regressive turning point in the 'Last Resort' narratives, as individuals were forced to move out of a prior occupation due to unemployment, or ill health. This advances our understanding of the potential for such transitions to be experienced as traumatic events, particularly when individuals struggle to find alternative work (Baldridge et al., 2017; Gabriel et al, 2010). In this thesis the types of prior work and relative status were also identified as critical issues. For example, in the regressive 'Last Resort' narratives the transition into cab driving was perceived as a problematic demotion into lower status work, whilst in the 'Salvation' narratives it was regarded as a proactive step-up into higher skilled, professional work. This builds on findings from studies in which individuals have differentiated

transitioning between low-skilled occupations as career advancement, when they perceive it to be a transition from lower status work (Bosmans et al., 2016; Lucas, 2011).

8.2.4.2 Other Career Boundaries

Once individuals had crossed the occupation boundary into cab driving, the intra-occupation boundaries then became salient in shaping different ways in which career narrative plotlines subsequently unfolded. On the one hand, participants who constructed the regressive narratives went on to feel negatively embedded in jobs and organisations, confirming the potential for perceptions of being trapped in dead-end work to arise (Hardy & Sanders, 2015). However, perceptions of more localised, nuanced boundaries enabled others to become positively embedded within specialist jobs and organisations of choice. Rather than perceiving their careers to have plateaued (Ng & Feldman, 2007), these participants appreciated options to settle on a long-term basis in a personally fulfilling role. In terms of career mobility, some enforced job/organisation transitions arose within cab driving as a result of difficulties with earning a living wage, or company closures. However, the intra-occupation boundaries were experienced by others as important status thresholds (Lamont & Molnar, 2002), with the potential to shape perceptions of hierarchical career pathways within cab driving just as they do in skilled occupations (Inkson et al., 2012). As a result, the progressive 'Salvation,' 'Second Career' and 'Lifelong' narratives went on to be shaped positively by perceptions of climbing a career ladder and notions of professional pride. These findings build upon a handful of studies that have identified potential for the construction of sustained, meaningful careers in low-skilled occupations (Lucas & Buzanell, 2004; Mooney et al., 2016), by providing detailed insights into this poorly understood process.

Personal boundaries also impacted upon the different ways in which cab driving career narratives unfolded beyond the initial occupation boundary crossing. In terms of the cab driver/customer boundary, individuals who constructed regressive accounts typically struggled with breaches of this boundary by abusive customers, aggravated in some instances by race issues. The latter

was often perceived as simply part of everyday racism experienced by ethnic minority groups (Duffy et al., 2016) and the cab drivers affected felt that they had little recourse to resolve this issue. In progressive accounts though, individuals either reported fewer problems with verbal and physical abuse, or had developed relational strategies to manage these problems, or opted to switch jobs to reduce risk. Furthermore, the relationship between the cab drivers and their customers varied from the briefest of one-off encounters, to the development over years of a sustained relationship akin to that of friend or family. Whilst some preferred a fleeting relationship, others sought more meaningful interactions. However, the development of longer-term relationships with clients was only an option for those working either for themselves or a company with a regular customer base, which offered opportunities to build a personal client list. The degree to which individuals were able to craft their preferred degree of rapport was then reflected in whether it contributed as a regressive, cyclical or progressive element of the career narrative over time.

In terms of the work/life boundary, the regressive and cyclical narratives identified particular struggles with working long hours and precarious contracts, whilst the progressive narratives emphasised value in flexible contracts and a cash income. However, whilst this boundary was salient across all of the narratives, it was central to differentiating the ‘Means to an End’ narratives. The perceived availability of flexible hours in the industry was the main reason why this group took up cab driving in the first place and then remained satisfied with the work in the longer-term. They then utilised flexible contracts proactively as a means of accommodating other life priorities. This included working around the challenges of family commitments, which are well-documented in the skilled sector (Tomlinson et al., 2018), particularly for women (Chung & Van der Horst, 2018). In the ‘Means to an End’ narratives though, both male and female participants expressed appreciation that flexible cab driving hours enabled them to spend time with family. Furthermore, whilst the work/life research literature tends to prioritise childcare issues (Santos, 2015), some of the ‘Means to an End’ career narratives highlighted a preference for cab driving work as a valuable source of flexible employment whilst setting-up another business.

In summary, the narrative analysis uncovered an unexpectedly wide array of different types of cab driving career narratives. Whilst the regressive and cyclical career narratives aligned with prevailing notions of low-skilled work as highly problematic, the progressive career narratives illustrated many different ways in which cab driving was perceived of in positive terms. This extensive variation reflected each cab driver's subjective perceptions of their complex and nuanced career boundary experiences over time.

8.3 Contributions to Knowledge and their Implications

The discussion now moves on to identity key contributions to knowledge and their implications. Whilst the previous section interpreted the findings associated with each of the research questions in the context of the academic literature, this section draws the various interpretations together and considers them from three key perspectives. First, it identifies how the results build on career theory, by extending our understanding of the subjective career, narrative and boundaries beyond the skilled sector. Second, it considers the implications of the thesis for contemporary career policy and practice, as the low-skilled sector continues to grow in the foreseeable future. Third, it highlights how the methodology devised for this thesis contributes to the development of best practice in the context of narrative research, through the development of more systematic procedures for both narrative analysis and counselling supervisory support for the researcher.

8.3.1 Theoretical

From a career theory perspective, this study overturns the notion that taking up work in a low-skilled occupation such as cab driving means abandoning any possibility of undertaking a career. Instead, it highlights how cab drivers construct a subjective career in the form of a narrative, which is shaped by the career boundaries that they encounter as their working life unfolds. In doing so, the thesis not only provides important new insights into career narratives and career boundaries beyond the skilled sector, but also the complex nature of the

subjective career itself. In terms of career boundary theory, the findings show career boundaries play a central role in shaping low-skilled cab driving careers, just as they do in skilled careers (Guest & Rodrigues, 2014). This includes the identification of a core set of salient boundaries with different properties such as permeability, durability and flexibility (Rodrigues et al., 2016). Just as in the skilled sector, these boundaries are also construed differently by cab drivers depending upon their personal preferences, career/life stage and the social and economic resources that they bring to their working lives (Gunz et al., 2007; Rodrigues et al., 2012). Whilst there are some differences with skilled occupations in terms of the particular boundaries that cab drivers identify as salient in shaping their careers, what is striking is how much common ground they share with empirical studies in more elite settings. This suggests that instead of restricting the application of career boundary theory to the skilled sector, it has much to offer as a means of understanding the nature of career in low-skilled work as well.

In terms of career narrative theory, this thesis challenges prevailing notions of low-skilled work as careerless and universally problematic. Instead, it identifies a rich and diverse array of individual cab driving experiences, akin to the variation identified in the skilled sector (LaPointe, 2010). The reasons underpinning the construction of regressive and cyclical cab driving career narratives were in part unique to low-skilled work settings, such as poor pay rates and long-working hours, which reinforce calls to strengthen contractual rights in cab driving (Emmott, 2015). Just like cab drivers though, skilled workers can find themselves trapped in work they dislike (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2011), or face challenges such as unemployment (Gabriel et al., 2010) and barriers to career mobility (Clarke, 2009). Additionally, the different types of progressive accounts of cab driving as a 'Means to an End,' 'Salvation,' 'Second Career,' 'Final' or 'Lifelong' career can all be mapped against skilled career experiences. This shows that whilst there may be some differences between the types of career narratives constructed in low and high-skill settings, there are also similarities. These findings therefore demand not only that credence be given to low-skilled career narratives, but that there is value in comparing them with career experiences in skilled settings.

The conceptual lens devised for this thesis also offers a new and more comprehensive means of investigating the complexities of contemporary subjective careers. It draws on career narrative theory which proposes that individuals select, order and evaluate their work experiences over time though the construction of a temporal narrative (Cohen & Duberley, 2013). Beyond this though, it argues that those work experiences take the form of encounters with career boundaries, which both structure social space and act as temporal reference points (Inkson et al., 2012). By bringing together notions of career narratives and boundaries in this way, the study was able to take a more integrated approach to investigating how cab drivers construct careers in a low-skilled setting. More specifically, it enabled the investigation of how different personal interpretations of multiple boundaries shaped a diverse array of career narratives. Taking this approach therefore offered new insights into the intricacies of low-skilled cab driving career narratives and how they are constructed. However, the same conceptual lens could be applied similarly to examine the complexities of subjective careers across other occupations in both low and high-skill sectors.

8.3.2 Policy and Practice

From a policy perspective, the thesis provides new insights into contemporary debates about the nature of low-skilled work and how best to support those employed in the sector. On the one hand, the regressive and cyclical narratives confirm the considerable career challenges that some can face. These bleak experiences wholly justify government concerns about vulnerable individuals who struggle to find ‘good work’ of choice (Taylor et al., 2017). The individuals concerned found themselves excluded not only from skilled work, but struggling to manage any key career boundaries associated with cab driving. Underpinning this lack of agency were factors that have been noted previously in the literature such as problems earning a living wage (Low Pay Commission, 2016), redundancy and health problems (Blustein et al., 2013) and cultural background (Hakak & Ariss, 2013). However, this study highlights the multiple and often inter-related challenges facing some individuals, which result in problems with managing every critical career boundary that they encounter. Government policy implemented in the UK such as the minimum wage (Low

Pay Commission, 2016) and legislation to strengthen contractual rights (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy [BEIS], 2018) do attempt to improve working conditions in the cab driving industry and beyond. However, policy has yet to address other issues proposed by the Taylor Review (2017), including better education and training, as well as collective representation for low-skilled workers (BEIS, 2018). Until these issues are fully addressed, this sector will continue to fail to provide universal opportunities for building sustainable, meaningful careers.

On the other hand, the progressive narratives offer novel insights into contemporary policy debates that have sought to make sense of occasional reports of positive low-skilled career experiences (Hebson et al., 2015; Spreitzer et al., 2017). These have been attributed largely to low-skilled work offering flexible contracts via the gig economy (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2015; 2017) and the 'Means to an End' narratives identified in this thesis illustrate how this can arise. However, that is only one of five different types of progressive career identified in this study of cab drivers. This highlights the importance for policy makers of understanding low-skilled workers personal career aspirations better, as well as the diverse ways in which they can be achieved. However, any attempt to actively promote low-skilled work as a rewarding career requires honest and thoughtful engagement from policymakers. It risks criticism from individuals and representative organisations who may perceive it as a cynical attempt to downplay problems with the sector (Trades Union Congress, 2015). Similar scepticism has been expressed about the designation of low-skilled workers such as cab drivers as 'keyworkers' during the Covid-19 pandemic (General, Municipal, Boilermakers' and Allied Trade Union, 2020). This illustrates how policymakers can play a part in upgrading the social status of low-skilled workers, but requires going beyond paying lip-service by ensuring effective remuneration rates, employment legislation and representation.

From a career counselling practice perspective, the thesis provides a more nuanced basis for informing interactions between practitioners and clients. On the one hand, the results highlight key facets of low-skilled work that individuals may require support with. Rather than presuming everyone can move freely

across low-skilled occupation and intra-occupation boundaries (Guest & Rodrigues, 2014), the results show how some would benefit from help with identifying and accessing low-skilled work roles of choice. This could include contacting trade bodies or encouraging clients to network with those already working in a particular low-skilled occupation. This study confirms the substantial challenges that unemployment and health problems can present (Blustein et al., 2013), but provides new insights into the particular problems faced by those making enforced transitions into what they perceive as lower status work. Support could include exploring career options within that occupation, as well as longer-term options to move on elsewhere. Challenges with the work/life boundary including low-pay issues and/or excessive working hours have been recognised (McBride et al., 2018), requiring a full review of career options and potential signposting to organisations offering financial advice. Finally, the central role that relational boundaries play in this study suggest some clients may benefit from developing strategies for managing problematic customers in a low-skilled setting.

However, the results of this study go beyond building our understanding of the challenges that clients may face in the low-skilled sector, to also identify potential opportunities. In particular, prevailing views of low-skilled work as problematic have meant that career counselling practitioners are likely to regard it as at best as a stepping-stone for clients into more highly skilled work (Plant & Kjaergard, 2016). However, the progressive narratives identify the potential for practitioners to consider with clients any potential for the low-skilled sector itself to offer a meaningful career path. This might be through taking advantage of flexible contracts, or earning a stop-gap income following unemployment, or whilst pursuing longer-term career plans. It could also involve gaining access to a specialist low-skilled job of choice, setting-up a business in that particular sector, using the work as bridge employment into retirement, or even an opportunity to establish a long-term career. Rather than dismissing low-skilled work out of hand, the thesis therefore illustrates how practitioners might weigh-up the pros and cons of a transition into low-skilled work in a more informed way. Furthermore, this study highlights value in exploring with clients how such a transition might be interpreted in the context of the broader career narrative, taking into account prior work experiences and future plans.

8.3.3 Methodological

From a methodological perspective, this thesis contributes to the development of best practice in narrative research. Whilst narrative approaches have become widely established (Riessman, 2016), some aspects still require more robust procedures to ensure high quality methods (Davis & Dwyer, 2017). The first contribution is the development of a systematic approach to undertaking narrative plotline analysis. The method has its roots in Gergen and Gergen's (1984) emplotment framework, which has been used as a basis for classifying different types of narrative. However, there is no widely agreed approach and researchers have developed their own idiosyncratic methods. In order to overcome this problem, the thesis integrated key elements from three different approaches as a means of developing a systematic procedure for identifying key forms of plotline. This involved mapping out narrative chronology (Alexander, 1988; Young et al., 1994), identifying evaluative text (Lieblich et al., 1998) and using researcher reflexivity (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2011). The approach detailed in Chapter 5 therefore offers a step-by-step approach to undertaking narrative plotline analysis that can be applied to other empirical studies.

Additionally, this study provides an account of incorporating counselling supervision into a narrative research study as a means of minimising harm to both the researcher and participants. There is increasing recognition that in-depth interviews such as those undertaken in a narrative study can involve the disclosure of highly personal and emotive issues (Josselson, 2007), as well as having the potential to mirror a therapeutic relationship (Haynes, 2006). This can raise challenges for the researcher who needs to ensure that participants are safe and supported, whilst also managing their own emotional responses and professional boundaries (Allmark et al., 2009). In this particular study, the potential for role conflict to arise between the researcher and counselling practitioner roles was identified (Etherington, 2007). This was addressed by incorporating counselling supervision into the fieldwork process. Whilst there is some precedent for this (Cordon et al, 2005; Elliott et al., 2012; Johnson, 2009), there are few detailed accounts available of how this was undertaken. A three-staged approach was developed for the purpose of this thesis: preliminary

contracting; counselling supervisory support during the fieldwork; and a final debriefing process (see Chapter 5 and Appendix 7). This approach can therefore be applied to other studies seeking to draw upon counselling supervision as a means of addressing the particular ethical challenges engendered by in-depth interviewing.

8.4 Limitations and Future Research

In undertaking a narrative approach, this study is subject to some limitations associated with qualitative research. First, in focusing on a sample size of 32 participants, the aim was to undertake an in-depth analysis of career narratives to understand their complex variations. However, the thesis does not claim to represent the career experiences of every cab driver. The fieldwork was drawn to a close once no further new types of cab driving career came to light in the locality in which this study was undertaken. It therefore remains possible that cab drivers in other parts of the UK or further afield have different stories to tell. Furthermore, not every cab driver who was approached agreed to participate in this study and their career narratives remain untold here. Second, undertaking narrative interviews offered the opportunity to record and interpret rich experiences of cab driving careers. However, whilst some researchers have suggested value in confirming transcripts and researcher interpretations with participants (Etherington, 2004), it was not possible in this study. Whilst the participants were kind enough to give up their time for an interview, attempts to engage them in any form of follow-up proved fruitless and on occasions risked losing their goodwill. As a result, the interpretations are those of the researcher, albeit that the process is set out as transparently as possible in this thesis and was subject to regular critical discussion through both the academic supervision process and conference presentations.

This research was undertaken within a single occupation, which has particular characteristics that may have shaped the outcomes of this study. The cab driving industry was interesting because of both its longevity (People 1st, 2016) and its partial transition to contemporary online platforms (Walters, 2017). It therefore offered the opportunity to study any potential for long-term careers to

evolve, but also explore career experiences in the contemporary gig economy. However, whilst this occupation has been classified typically as low-skilled work (Standard Occupational Classification, 2020), the licensing process differentiates it from some other forms of low-skilled work (Butcher, 2016). These licenses underpinned some of this occupation's more widely known career boundaries, such as those differentiating minicab, taxi and black cab jobs, and some roles required individuals to fund their own licensing costs. Focusing on cab driving in this study therefore offered valuable insights into diverse career narratives even within a single occupation, but means that caution is required in making any claims to represent the low-skilled sector as a whole.

In terms of recommendations for future research, the results of this study and the limitations that have been identified indicate many fruitful routes forward. Most critically, there remains a need for a step-change in the volume of career research focusing on the low-skilled sector. This thesis, in conjunction with the existing small body of related research, illustrate that it deserves greater attention. Studies of other low-skilled occupations, as well as scaled-up studies across the low-skilled sector, would build a better understanding of different types of low-skilled career experiences and their prevalence. This study also highlights value in undertaking an interpretive approach to understanding complex subjective careers in low-skilled settings and offers a conceptual lens for doing so. Additionally, it would be interesting to focus on the career experiences of particular groups of low-skilled workers such as ethnic minorities, or those approaching retirement, to understand their particular perspectives better. Beyond this though, the thesis has highlighted some rarely acknowledged common ground between careers unfolding in low/high skill career settings. This suggests value in investigating career issues in sample groups containing individuals from both low and high-skilled settings, in order to compare and contrast career experiences.

8.5 Personal Reflection

This doctoral study has challenged me throughout to think about and question the meaning of career. The notion of career sits at the heart of both my researcher and practitioner roles. Prior to undertaking this thesis, I had already encountered different career theories as part of my MSc studies and applied various conceptualisations of career in my practice work. So, prior to undertaking this research, I felt that I had a good overview of the nature of career and my personal positioning in relation to the concept. However, undertaking this doctoral study required me to re-engage and grapple again with the many ideas of career that abound. In trying to define career, I struggled to pin down some core essence that unites its many conceptualisations. I rediscovered career theories that I had all but forgotten about in the course of my everyday work. I was struck anew by the long legacy of the notion of career as hierarchical advancement, in spite of the many more inclusive theories that have evolved subsequently. Mostly though, I spent much time pondering the notion of the subjective career. This study has reinforced for me the importance of giving credence to people's own interpretations of their working lives from a career perspective. At the same time, it has challenged me to devise robust research that enables us to understand these issues better. As with all qualitative research, it has sometimes been a confusing and unpredictable process. It has always been fascinating though and I hope to have done justice to those who shared their cab driving experiences.

Undertaking this research has also required me to reflect frequently upon how my career researcher and practitioner roles can each inform the other. As outlined in the opening chapter of this thesis, the study has its roots in my practitioner work where I have often struggled with the relative shortage of research specifically concerned with low-skilled career issues. Having the opportunity to engage with the academic literature has uncovered research sources that I was previously unaware of. Interviewing cab drivers and engaging with the diversity of their career experiences has also provided me with a more informed basis for working with clients who are employed in low-skilled settings. At the same time, engaging with counselling supervision as part of this study has helped me to appreciate better the value of my practitioner

interviewing skills in a qualitative research setting. Prior to undertaking the thesis, I was apt to regard my practitioner role simply as problematic in raising role conflict issues in a research setting. However, I have learnt a great deal more about not only what differentiates my researcher and practitioner roles, but the common ground that they usefully share.

8.6 Final Conclusions

The opening chapters of this thesis identified a pressing need to not only acknowledge the potential for subjective careers to be constructed in the low-skilled sector, but also understand them better. Where explanations for the relative dearth of research effort to date have been attempted, they cite the growth of the skilled sector during the last century (Ng et al., 2005), or the problematic nature of low-skilled work and its lack of objective career opportunities (Lucas & Buzanell, 2004). More often though, a research focus upon skilled careers appears to have simply become the established norm. This situation has persisted in spite of the emergence in recent decades of broader definitions of career (Inkson et al., 2015), or the contemporary growth of low-skilled employment in the UK (Wilson et al., 2016). Occasionally, repeated calls for more research have resulted in sporadic career-related studies in low-skilled settings, resulting in small pockets of useful research examining subjective career pathways (Thomas, 1989), success (Hennequin, 2007), identity (Lucas, 2011) or specific occupations (Hebson, 2015; Stacey, 2005). Collectively, such studies have hinted at the potential for individuals to construct varied subjective careers in the low-skilled sector. This research is fragmented across both time and academic discipline though, thereby lacking any coherent approach or critical mass.

In order to help address this substantive gap in the literature, this thesis investigated the subjective career experiences of cab drivers. This occupation has been classified consistently as low-skilled work (Standard Occupational Classification, 2020), characterised by poor pay rates, precarious contracts and low status (People 1st, 2016). Cab drivers' unfolding work experiences were examined through a conceptual lens developed specifically for this study. This

drew upon and integrated conceptualisations of career as both narrative and a boundary crossing process. Independently, both of these conceptualisations have been proposed as a valuable way of addressing the complexities of career. Whilst career narratives can be understood as the means by which individuals make sense of their unfolding work experiences (LaPointe, 2010), careers have also been conceptualised as a boundary crossing phenomenon, in the sense that individuals work within and transition across boundaries during the course of their working life (Inkson, 2006; Inkson et al., 2012). By arguing that career narratives are shaped by career boundaries, this thesis was able to take a more integrated approach to investigating cab driving experiences. This included examining which boundaries were salient, why they were perceived as important and the different types of career narratives that cab drivers constructed about their career boundary experiences.

A sample group of 32 cab drivers in England was interviewed using an in-depth, narrative approach that covered their early career, the transition into cab driving, the subsequent unfolding of their cab driving work experiences and any future plans. Their temporal career narratives were examined using thematic and narrative plotline analysis. The results of this study then identify how different perceptions of multiple career boundaries shape the construction of an array of cab driving career narratives. These findings overturn notions of low-skilled work as universally problematic and careerless. Instead, the thesis illustrates how a core set of salient career boundaries are central to shaping careers in cab driving. Furthermore, the data analysis demonstrates how cab drivers' varied experiences of engaging with these boundaries at different stages of their working life underpin the construction of diverse types of career narratives. Whilst some cab drivers experienced career boundaries as inflexible barriers restricting career mobility and choice, others perceived them positively as markers of career advancement, professional identity and a means of crafting careers to meet personal specifications. Depending upon their different perceptions, cab drivers then constructed personal narratives that ranged from bleak accounts of cab driving as a last resort career, to usefully flexible work or a sustainable and satisfying long-term career.

Based upon these findings, the thesis makes theoretical, policy and practice, as well as methodological contributions to knowledge. In terms of career theory, it demonstrates how a fascinating array of diverse subjective careers can be experienced even within a single low-skilled occupation. Furthermore, it extends our understanding of both career boundary and career narrative theory beyond the skilled sector and in doing so highlights some rarely acknowledged common ground between the two. This includes the central role that career boundaries play in shaping careers in a low-skilled occupation as well as high-skilled settings. It also highlights how low-skilled workers construct complex career narratives, reflecting both problematic career experiences as well as positive ones, just as skilled workers do. These findings open up substantive new research paths, from investigating subjective careers more widely across the low-skilled sector, to comparisons of low/high-skilled career experiences. Beyond theoretical issues, the thesis underlines the vital role that policymakers can play in ensuring that the low-skilled sector offers universal opportunities for workers to construct meaningful careers, as well as how practitioners can work in a more informed way with individuals seeking to build careers in this setting. Finally, this study strengthens methodological approaches by offering more systematic approaches to undertaking narrative research.

For many historic reasons, work deemed as low-skilled has been long regarded by society as a problematic element of the labour market that is devoid of opportunities to construct careers (Mooney et al., 2016). Career researchers have then been arguably well-placed to challenge these traditional views, as notions of career have broadened within academic communities. Instead, by continuing to prioritise investigations of elite work experiences, career research risks perpetuating the current state of play and thereby failing both low-skilled workers themselves and wider society. This is not to say that researchers should downgrade well-known problems with low-skilled work, by promoting the sector as a potential source of rewarding careers. Rather, that shedding light on the diversity of career experiences in this sector offers a means of supporting all low-skilled workers more effectively through better informed career policy and practice. Furthermore, pursuing the future research routes identified by this thesis has the potential to begin breaking-down sometimes unhelpful

distinctions between low and high-skilled work and thereby move the career field forward in a more integrated way.

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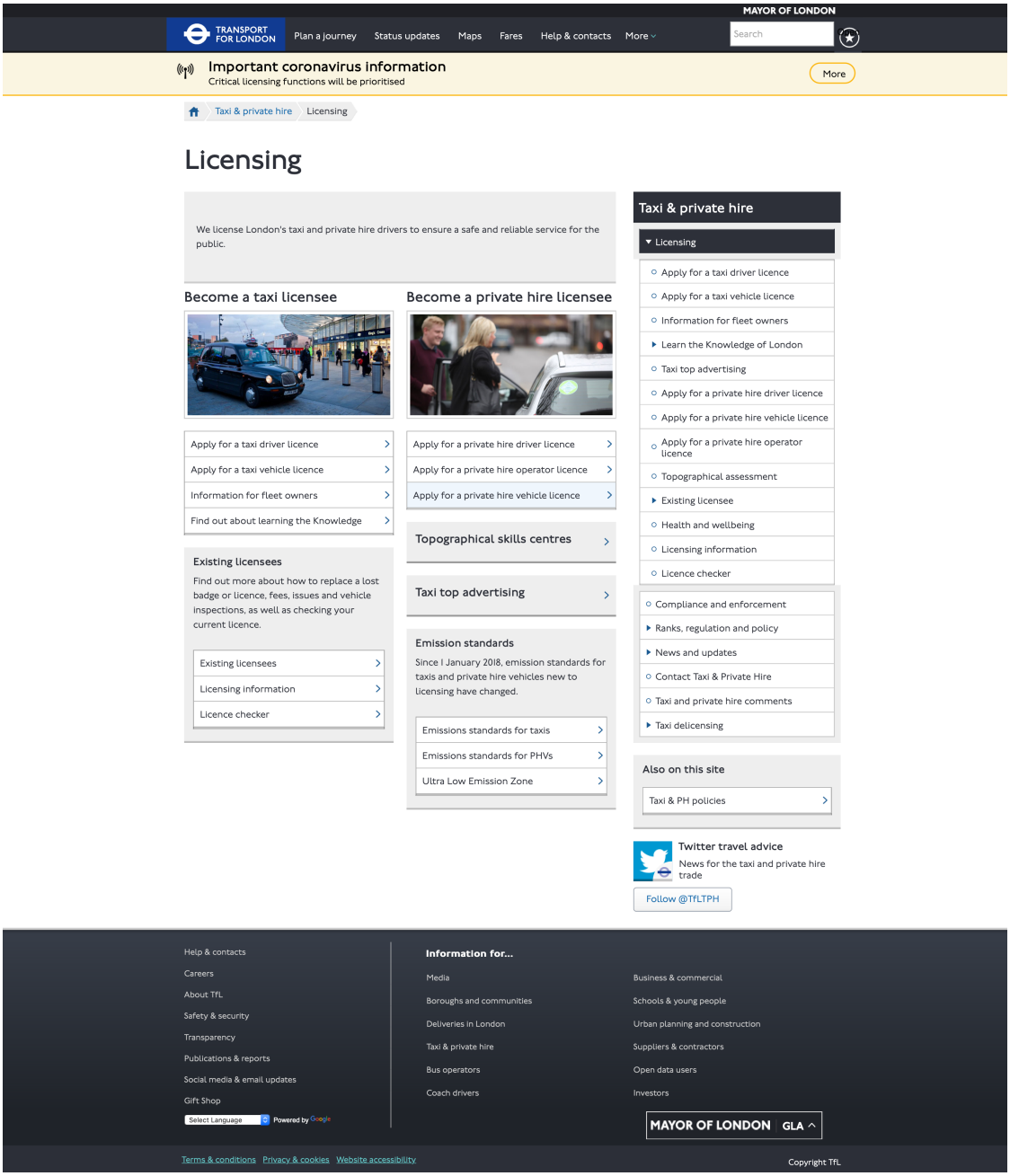
APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Mapping the Literature

STAGE 1 CAREER TEXTBOOKS
Provided useful overview of the career field/low-skilled work perspectives: - chronological history of the field; career definitions; key academic disciplines; key bodies of career research; seminal book chapters. Examples of sources: Arnold (1997). Managing Careers Into the 21st Century. Arthur, Hall & Lawrence (1989). Handbook of Career Theory. Collin & Young (2000). The Future of Career. Gunz & Peiperl (2007). Handbook of Career Studies. Gunz, Lazarova & Mayrhofer (2020). The Routledge Companion to Career Studies. Gunz & Mayrhofer (2018). Rethinking Career Studies: Facilitating Conversation across Boundaries with the Social Chronology Framework. Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen (2018). Career Guidance for Social Justice. Inkson, Dries & Arnold (2015). Understanding Careers. Kidd (2006). Understanding Career Counselling. Peiperl, Arthur & Anand (2002). Career Creativity: Explorations in the Remaking of Work. Peiperl, Arthur, Goffee & Morris (2000). Career Frontiers: New Conceptions of Working Lives. Reid (2016). Introduction to Career Counselling and Coaching. Savickas (2011). Career Counseling.
STAGE 2 ACADEMIC JOURNALS
Initial hand searches were undertaken of career journals/high-ranking journals from other disciplines addressing career issues (2012-2017). This identified key low-skilled topics including career patterns; career success; career identity; dirty work; job crafting; occupations (e.g. care sector workers, hospitability workers, transport drivers). Examples of sources: Academy of Management British Journal of Guidance & Counselling Career Development International Career Development Quarterly Gender, Work and Organization Human Relations Journal of Career Assessment Journal of Career Development Journal of Counseling and Development Journal of Counseling Psychology Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology Journal of Vocational Behavior Organization Sociology Work, Employment & Society

STAGE 3 ONLINE DATABASES
Using online databases helped to build the literature base across both a broader timespan, academic disciplines and low-skilled occupations. Search terms were informed by topics identified from prior Stage 2 and included: - 'career' + low-skilled; unskilled; semi-skilled; blue-collar; manual work; dirty work - 'low-skilled' + career pattern; career success; career identity - low-skilled occupations e.g. taxi driver; bus driver; lorry driver Examples of sources: ABI/Inform Global Business Source Premier APA PsychArticles APA PsychInfo Web of Science (Social Sciences Citation Index)
STAGE 4 GREY LITERATURE
Beyond peer-reviewed academic literature, a variety of grey literature was sourced through citations from Stage 1, 2 & 3 plus Google searches. This provided useful policy context about issues such as: gig economy; labour market forecasts; low-pay issues; precarious work; sector reports (e.g. cab driving, care sector, retail sector); social groups (e.g. migrants). Examples of Sources: Government Reports Newspaper Articles Policy Institutes (e.g. Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Resolution Foundation) Professional Bodies (e.g. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) Trade Unions (e.g. General, Municipal, Boilermakers' and Allied Trade Union)
STAGE 5 ONGOING SEARCHES
Literature searches then remained ongoing throughout the research process, which helped to consolidate the literature base and ensure that it remained up to date. This included tracking new research, contemporary events (e.g. Brexit, Covid 19) and unfolding policy debates (e.g. the nfature of 'good' work). Examples of Sources: Setting alerts for online databases, Google alerts Attending academic conferences Monitoring news outlets

Appendix 2 Cab Driving Licensing Regulations



Appendix 3 Cab Driving Job Profile (National Careers Service, 2020)

Taxi driver

Taxi drivers (also Minicab Driver) pick up passengers and charge a fee to take them to their destination by the quickest route.

Average salary (a year)

£14,000 Starter
to
£30,000 Experienced

Typical hours (a week)

41 to 43 a week

You could work

Evenings / weekends / bank holidays as customers demand

How to become a taxi driver

You can get into this job through:

- applying directly
- taking a college course

College

You may be able to do a college course, which could give you an advantage when looking for work. Courses include:

- Level 2 Certificate in Road Passenger Vehicle Driving - Taxi and Private Hire
- Level 2 Certificate in Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver

Entry requirements

You'll usually need:

- 2 or more GCSEs at grades 9 to 3 (A* to D) for a level 2 course

Appendix 4 Cab Driving Vocational Qualifications

enquiries@treble-t.com

- Home
- About Us
- Careers
- VRQ Qualifications
  - Vocational Qualifications
  - Assessment
  - Specification
- Realising opportunities
- Our Support Packages
- Contact us

Specification

VRQ Qualifications

Vocationally Related Qualifications

The VRQ Level 2 Certificate in Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver (QCF) is a stand-alone qualification offered by Awarding Organisations such as Edexcel within their BTEC range of qualifications. Success in the VRQ will provide a clear pathway to meeting all the requirements of underpinning knowledge of the relevant level 2 NVQ Level 2 Certificate.

This VRQ qualification consists of nine units:

- **Unit 1:** Health and safety in the taxi and private hire work environment.
- **Unit 2:** Road safety when driving passengers in a taxi or private hire vehicle.
- **Unit 3:** Professional customer service in the taxi and private hire industry.
- **Unit 4:** Taxi and private hire vehicle maintenance and safety inspections.
- **Unit 5:** The regulatory framework of the taxi and private hire industry.
- **Unit 6:** Taxi and private hire services for passengers who require assistance.
- **Unit 7:** Routes and fares in the taxi and private hire vehicle industries.
- **Unit 8:** Transporting of parcels, luggage and other items in the taxi and private hire industries.
- **Unit 9:** Transporting of children and young persons by taxi or private hire vehicle.

Assessment

Assessment is through online multi-choice question tests set and managed by Edexcel. Unit 6 also requires practical assessment in the operation of ramps, swivel seats and wheelchairs.

Specification

http://www.edexcel.com/quals/Specialist/taxi-ph-driver-lvl2

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Transport Training Technology

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Bury
Lancashire
BL9 0EX

Tel: 01923 282241
Email: enquiries@treble-t.com

Appendix 5 Information Sheet and Consent Form

RESEARCH PROJECT: Working As A Cab Driver

Background to the research project:

My name is Helen Cooper and I work as a career researcher. I am undertaking a study to understand why individuals switch into cab driving and how they feel about doing this type of work. This occupation is interesting as it attracts people from a variety of previous work, who may have different reasons for becoming cab drivers.

The findings from this research will help us to understand better why people switch into cab driving, if they find the transition easy or difficult and what kind of work they go on to do.

I am undertaking this research as part of a PhD in the Department of Organizational Psychology, Birkbeck, University of London.

Taking part in the research project:

In order to collect information for this study, I am interested in talking to anyone currently working as a cab driver.

Research interviews will cover discussion of topics such as:
- any types of work undertaken prior to cab driving
- what led to the move into cab driving work
- whether it seemed easy or difficult to change occupation
- the experience of working as a cab driver

If you would be interested in taking part in this study, the research would involve arranging a short interview at a convenient date and location. I usually tape the interview to make sure that all information is accurately recorded. All individual and organisational names will be changed in any reporting, to protect anonymity.

In return for your time, I would be happy to send you a summary of the research findings when the study is complete.

How to contact me:

If you would like to take part in this study, then you can get in touch with me either by email or telephone to arrange an interview. If you would like further information about this study, or have any questions about taking part, then do contact me.

Also, if you know anyone else who might be willing to participate in this research then I would be grateful if you could pass on my contact details.

Contact: Email helen.cooper@bbk.ac.uk Tel 07906 692279

RESEARCH PROJECT: Changing Occupation To Work As A Cab Driver

CONSENT FORM

This consent form is for research participants who are currently working as cab drivers and can talk about their experiences.

Research interviews will cover discussion of topics such as:

- any types of work undertaken prior to cab driving
- what led to the move into cab driving work
- whether it seemed easy or difficult to change occupation
- the experience of working as a cab driver

The researcher will not be able to offer any careers advice at this interview, but free career information is available through the National Careers Service: Tel 0800 100 900

In giving my consent, I confirm that:

1. I have read the Information Sheet and had the opportunity to ask the researcher any questions I have about the study.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

4. I agree to the interview being taped and transcribed. I understand that I have the right to ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

5. I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that all names will be changed and any quotes anonymised. The information will only be used for this research project and any supervision, reporting and publications arising from it.

6. I understand that all data will be stored securely and is covered by the Data Protection Act.

Name……

Signature……

Date……

Contact: Email helen.cooper@bbk.ac.uk Tel 07906 692279

Appendix 6 Research Safety Protocols

1. Establishing research interview safety protocols:

- Discuss and agree protocols with PhD supervisor prior to commencing fieldwork
- Review protocols on a regular basis at PhD supervision sessions

2. Recruiting research participants:

- Seek referrals for potential research participants via an agreed process:
  - through an organisation e.g. licensed operator
  - through snowball sampling e.g. driver colleagues
- Prior to interviewing, check that cab driver research participants are named on local authority licensing lists
- Speak to research participants by telephone to arrange interview and screen for any safety issues, or concerns

3. Interview arrangements:

- Ensure that interviews are held in a safe place to minimise risk:
  - on organisational premises e.g. licensed operator
  - in a public space e.g. café
- Arrange interviews during daylight hours whenever possible
- Park in a safe and accessible location
- Dress appropriately for interview setting

4. Maintaining contact:

- Agree nominated contact and advise PhD Supervisor, Dept of OP accordingly
- Provide weekly schedule of visits to nominated contact including:
  - location of visits
  - times of interviews
  - name of research participants being interviewed
- Telephone/text nominated contact within one hour of completing each research interview
- Advise nominated contact of any changes in interview schedule as they arise

5. Interview resources:

- Carry a mobile phone and charger back-up at all times
- Carry a personal security alarm at all times
- Carry sufficient cash to cover daily expenses and emergency travel costs

6. Notifying personal safety concerns:

- Terminate any interview which raises personal safety concerns
- Log any personal safety issues in fieldwork diary if they arise
- Notify nominated contact and PhD supervisor of any personal safety concerns as soon as possible
- If necessary, revise safety protocols in the light of any personal safety concerns

7. Debriefing:

- Review research interview safety protocols on completion of all fieldwork

These protocols have been drawn up based on:

Birkbeck Health and Safety Services (2013). *A Code of Practice for Health & Safety in Social Science Research*. Downloaded on 27 May 2013 from: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/so/guidance/SOCIALRESEARCH

Keele University (2013). *Lone Working Policy.* Downloaded from: http://www.keele.ac.uk/media/keeleuniversity/healthandsafety/loneworking/Lone%20Working%20Policy%20for%20web%20Nov%202010.pdf

Paterson, B.L., Gregory, D. & Thorne, S., (1999). A protocol for researcher safety. *Qualitative Health Research* 9 (2) 259-269.

Social Research Association, (2001), *A Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers.* Downloaded on 27 May 2013 from: http://the-sra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/safety_code_of_practice.pdf

Appendix 7 Counselling Supervision Process

1. Background

In line with all university research involving human participants, Birkbeck, University of London requires its staff and students to comply with its ethics policy (Drury, 2019). This is to ensure that key ethical principles including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, data integrity and avoidance of harm are adhered to. The ethical review that I undertook at the outset of this doctoral study categorised it as 'routine' research, because it did not involve interviewing a vulnerable population or asking direct questions about overtly sensitive topics. However, even 'routine' research can raise ethical challenges. In undertaking the ethical review for this thesis, one issue that I identified concerned the potential for role conflict to arise associated with my dual roles as both career researcher and career counselling practitioner. From an ethical perspective this issue falls under the heading of 'potential harm' which is concerned with any psychological, physical, or environmental harm that may arise during the course of the research process. The university's ethical policy requires the researcher to not only minimise any harm that might be experienced by participants and/or themselves, but also put in place support to help alleviate that harm.

Having identified the potential for researcher-practitioner role conflict to arise during the course of this study, I incorporated counselling supervision into the research process. This form of supervision is standard practice within the counselling profession, providing impartial third-party oversight, advice and support with client caseloads. The nature of the supervision is tailored to the individual counsellor (McLeod, 2009) and can range from discussing specific cases with a supervisor, to more generic issues including role boundary management (Copeland, 2005; Inskipp & Proctor, 2001; McMahon, 2004; Reid, 2016). However, qualitative researchers have also turned to counselling supervision as a means of minimising harm arising from managing in-depth interviews (Cordon et al, 2005; Elliott et al., 2012; Johnson, 2009). My personal aim in incorporating counselling supervision into this doctoral study was to help

manage my researcher-practitioner role boundaries as effectively as possible. This process can 'provide an element of support for the researcher and an element of protection for the participant' (Hart & Crawford-Wright, 1999, p. 213) by ensuring that role boundaries are adhered to. It can also help the researcher to process and alleviate any emotional labour associated with researcher-practitioner role conflict (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). I therefore identified counselling supervision as a valuable ethical tool in this study, providing me with expert support in role boundary management.

The counselling supervision process itself unfolded in three stages. A preparatory stage covered preliminary discussions and contracting. The second stage involved meeting regularly with a counselling supervisor during the fieldwork to discuss role conflict issues. The final stage reviewed both my role conflict experiences and the counselling supervision process as a whole. Each of these three stages are discussed in turn.

Stage 1 Preliminary Discussions and Contracting

Following the ethical review, I organised a series of preliminary meetings with both my academic supervisor and a potential counselling supervisor to discuss how best to incorporate counselling supervision into the research process. I discussed the ethical review with my academic supervisor, and we agreed there was potential value in seeking out counselling supervision to assist with researcher-practitioner role conflict issues. I then met with a colleague at Birkbeck who had agreed to provide counselling supervisory support for my doctoral study. We discussed the nature of the research project and the reasons why I might need support with managing researcher-practitioner role conflict issues. I then met with both my academic and counselling supervisor to discuss and ensure the clear differentiation of their respective roles in the research process. These preliminary meetings were useful in scoping out the nature of the counselling supervisory project, as well as clarifying our individual roles in that process.

Following these preliminary meetings, I went on to confirm contracting details with my counselling supervisor. As is customary, she provided a written contract for her services. This covered issues such as number/length of sessions, payment arrangements and confidentiality. We arranged eight sessions in total. This involved an initial session to discuss my prior researcher-practitioner role conflict experiences, six sessions to take place during the fieldwork and a final session to review the process. This initial contracting therefore focused on the practical details of the counselling supervision process and how it would unfold.

Stage 2 Counselling Supervision Sessions

The initial session took place prior to the fieldwork and involved reflecting back on prior difficulties that I had experienced with researcher-practitioner role conflict. This was a useful process, because it helped to clarify my concerns. Those problems had arisen whilst undertaking narrative interviews with teachers during my MSc research project, which investigated experiences of occupational embeddedness at midlife (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2011). Whilst not an overtly sensitive research topic, participants disclosed highly personal reasons for having to remain in teaching such as financial difficulties, health problems and relationship breakdowns. Whilst some reported being reconciled to staying in teaching, others felt trapped and several participants cried during their research interview. As a counsellor, I was experienced at managing emotive interviews. However, I found it stressful not to go on and help participants resolve their difficulties as I would as a practitioner. This problem was exacerbated by revisiting these interviews subsequently to transcribe and analyse them. My specific concern with the doctoral study was that I might feel similarly conflicted during the fieldwork and data analysis stages of the research.

The following six counselling supervision sessions then took place alongside the fieldwork interviews, approximately once per month. I discussed role conflict issues with my counselling supervisor as they arose: what triggered them and ways of managing them. As with my prior MSc project, I found it particularly difficult to deal with interviews in which participants described substantive

problems with their career. This went beyond simply disliking cab driving, to describing considerable problems with issues such as mental distress triggered by their work experiences. As a career counsellor, I would offer support with these issues and follow-up with additional meetings to help resolve them. As a researcher though, my primary role was to listen and record an interview, before moving on to meet the next participant. Whilst I advised participants who were struggling with their career to seek out support, I was often left with a stressful sense of unfinished business.

However, discussing these cases with my counselling supervisor helped me to gain a better perspective. I was able to appreciate that, whilst my practitioner instinct was to help, participants themselves did not necessarily have that expectation of me. Additionally, I was able to signpost participants to follow-up with the National Careers Service, which was a free service that most were unaware of. I was also able to better appreciate that the research project itself could ultimately prove valuable in informing support services for low-skilled workers. Counselling supervision therefore enabled me to resolve role conflict issues as they arose and prevented me from feeling overwhelmed by them during the fieldwork process.

Stage 3 Follow-up Meeting

The eighth and final supervision session took place shortly after the fieldwork had been completed. The aim of this particular meeting was to review the counselling supervision process as a whole. Overall, I found this type of supervision to be an invaluable means of managing researcher-practitioner role conflict issues. Unlike the experience with my earlier MSc narrative study, resolving role conflict issues as they arose during this doctoral research meant that I could move on in a more informed way as the fieldwork unfolded. I became more aware of the benefits of my counselling experience as a means of handling emotive research interviews. At the same time, discussing the role conflict issues that I encountered helped to process these experiences and prevented them from becoming emotionally burdensome. By the end of the process, I was clearer about both the areas of overlap and differences between

my researcher and practitioner roles, as well as how to manage any sense of conflict between the two. Beyond managing ethical issues, counselling supervision therefore provided a means of professional development as both a career researcher and practitioner during the course of this research.

Final Reflections

Whilst the counselling supervision process outlined above was organised as a self-contained and time limited process, its positive outcomes extended in practice beyond the fieldwork stage of this thesis. First, unlike my MSc experience, I was untroubled by problematic role conflict issues during the transcribing and analysis of interview data. As a result I was able to move on and focus more effectively on these tasks. Second, I have continued to reflect on both the pros and cons of counselling skills in a qualitative research setting. This has resulted in going on to consider how qualitative researchers might draw upon the counselling profession as a means of strengthening ethical research practice (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2014). This is not to say that every researcher might require counselling supervisory support (though some might benefit from it), but rather that longstanding counselling theory, training and supervisory practice may provide researchers with a valuable source of information about the ethical management of researcher-participant relationships.

Appendix 8 Research Invitation Flyer

ARE YOU A TAXI OR MINICAB DRIVER?

WOULD YOU BE HAPPY TO DISCUSS WHAT IT IS LIKE TO DO YOUR JOB?

COULD YOU SPARE 30 MINUTES TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH PROJECT?

What is the research about?

This university research project aims to find out what it is like to switch into cab driving and do this type of work.

What would you have to do?

The research involves a short meeting at a time and location that is convenient to you. I would like to ask about what job(s) you did before becoming a cab driver, why you switched into cab driving work and what it is like to do this job.

Does it matter how long ago I became a driver?

I would like to talk to anyone who has switched into cab driving work - whether it was recently, or many years ago.

Who am I?

My name is Helen Cooper - I am a researcher at Birkbeck, University of London. I do a variety of research that finds out about the jobs and careers that people do.

If you would like to find out more about taking part in this research, you can contact me either by telephone or email:

Email helen.cooper@bbk.ac.uk Tel 07906 692279

Appendix 9 Career Narrative Exemplars

9.1 'Last Resort'

CHRONOLOGICAL DATA TABLE					
Driver Case Number	**Past Work Experiences**	**Transition to Cab Driving**	**Subsequent Cab Driving Roles**	**Current Role**	**Future Plans**
Driver 30 'Rahim'	Migrated from Nigeria in his early 20s Worked in cafes, restaurants Trained & worked as a baker 10 yrs Developed health problems	Age 50-55 Involuntary Minicab driver Friend helped him with license & finding work	Stayed as minicab driver Stayed with same large cab firm Racism issues with customers Struggles with long hours	Age 55-60 Minicab driver, day shifts Ongoing problems with all boundaries	Trapped in cab driving Would like to work as taxi driver, but no contacts or money

FIELDWORK JOURNAL - EXTRACTS (DRIVER 30)

'This was a difficult interview to hear. The participant himself was seemingly matter of fact about his circumstances, but some of his words have haunted me now afterwards. There was a tangible sense of defeat about him - in the way he sat, his tone of voice.'

'I have been putting off transcribing this interview. I have been worrying about this participant since I interviewed him, even though he is not my responsibility in the way that a client would be. I keep thinking of the ways that I might help if he was my client. He had no expectations of me, but that almost makes it worse because he appeared to have lost any sense of hope.'

EVALUATION TABLE

NARRATIVE / BOUNDARY	REGRESSIVE PLOTLINE	EXAMPLE
	LAST RESORT	RAHIM (DRIVER 30)
OCCUPATION	Enforced boundary crossing. Career Demotion. Negative embeddedness. Boundary as a trap.	***Enforced crossing as a result of ill-health, career demotion and trapped*** *'I am black and I am ill. It is difficult to find work. Who wants you to work for them? And so this is why I am minicab driving. What else is there to do? This is the only thing that I can do now.'*
JOB	Dislike job, but restricted boundary crossing options.	**Minicab driver, Day shifts** *'But the problem is you need to know someone for the taxis. You need to know someone and you need money… money for the licenses.'*
ORGANISATION	Dislike organisation, but restricted boundary crossing options.	**Commission driver for a large company:** Lack of social networks, no confidence to approach alternative cab firms
CAB DRIVER/ CUSTOMER	Poor rapport.	***Difficulties building rapport*** *'You are black and customers do not want this, they do not want you to drive them.'*
CAB DRIVING WORK/LIFE	Poor work/life balance.	**Struggling with necessity to work long hours to earn sufficient income**

Evaluation of Career Boundary: Negative; Negative/Positive; Positive; Neutral

9.2 'Fleeting'

CHRONOLOGICAL DATA TABLE					
Driver Case Number	**Past Work Experiences**	**Transition to Cab Driving**	**Subsequent Cab Driving Roles**	**Current Role**	**Future Plans**
Driver 25 'Melvin'	Left school age 16 yrs Always wanted to work as a lorry driver Worked as a long-distance lorry driver for 30 yrs Wanted to work nearer home/family	Age 50-55 Voluntary Taxi driver Company helped him with license	Stayed as taxi driver Stayed with same small cab firm Struggles with social skills & customers Struggles with long hours	Age 50-55 Taxi driver, rents car, day shifts Likes his employer Ongoing problems with personal boundaries	Plan to leave cab driving in < 1 yr Wants to return to lorry driving Offer of lorry driving work in London

FIELDWORK JOURNAL - EXTRACTS (DRIVER 25)

'At the start of this interview I thought that this participant had made the right decision given his age – working nearer to home, making good use of his transferable driving skills. All sensible plans. And his face lit up when he talked about his current employer and pride in his taxi vehicle. But I remember feeling the story shift part way through, to his struggles with customers, the long hours. So that in the end his final disclosure about leaving to go back to lorry driving came as no surprise.'

'I was waiting for the shift in plotline when I transcribed this interview. His struggles were there all along really when I knew to look for them. I wonder if he has told his wife or employer that he is leaving since I interviewed him? I hope he finds a new truck to replace the one he misses so much.'

EVALUATION TABLE

NARRATIVE / BOUNDARY	REGRESSIVE PLOTLINE	EVALUATION EXAMPLE
	FLEETING	MELVIN (DRIVER 25)
OCCUPATION	(In)Voluntary transition. Dislike cab driving. Decide to leave in less than 1 year.	**Gave up long-distance lorry driving to be closer to home, stay less than 1 year:** *'You can get a man out the truck you know, but you can't get the truck out the man and that's the thing really.'*
JOB	(Dis)like Job.	**Taxi driver, Day shifts**
ORGANISATION	(Dis)like organisation.	**Commission driver for a small company:** 'My car is the best in the fleet.'iiiii
CAB DRIVER/ CUSTOMER	Poor/Good rapport with customers.	**Difficulties with adapfting to travelling with customers:** *'Well I had to change, because in the wagons you can be very on your own and it was all right to be terrible and grumpy. But you can't be like that with customers here, you've got to be on best behaviour.'*
CAB DRIVING WORK/LIFE	Poor/Good work/life balance.	**Struggled with necessity to work long hours to earn sufficient income:** *'It's bloody hard work to be honest. It's bloody long hours to make a living. I'm on six days a week, working 12 hour shifts.'*

Evaluation of Career Boundary: Negative; Negative/Positive; Positive; Neutral

9.3 'Recurrent'

CHRONOLOGICAL DATA TABLE					
Driver Case Number	**Past Work Experiences**	**Transition to Cab Driving**	**Subsequent Cab Driving Roles**	**Current Role**	**Future Plans**
Driver 02 'Steve'	After 6th Form College, went on to train as a Head Chef Developed acute food allergies & had to find other work Unemployed Switched to sales/retail work and promoted to store manager Increasingly disliked fixed hours of work	Age 25-30 Voluntary Taxi driver part-time Friend helped with license & offered job	Taxi driver, full-time, night shifts Worked for several cab firms Struggled with work/life boundary - left to work as security guard Returned to set up own cab firm - when that closed he went back to security work Returned again – then left due to health issues & set up coffee shop	Age 40-45 Taxi driver, full-time, night shifts Enjoys autonomy of flexible working hours Likes night shift routines & customers	Thinking about setting up his own cab firm again Using prior knowledge to run a successful cab business

FIELDWORK JOURNAL - EXTRACTS (DRIVER 02)

'My main sense at the end of this interview is of being out of breath at the sheer number of twists and turns. I could hardly keep up. It wasn't just that he has been in and out of cab driving more times that I could keep track of. His whole life has been lived at such a pace, full of ups and downs. And he's a night driver, I definitely remember that - loud and clear.'

EVALUATION TABLE

NARRATIVE / BOUNDARY	CYCLICAL PLOTLINE	EVALUATION EXAMPLE
	RECURRENT	STEVE (DRIVER 02)
OCCUPATION	Transition repeatedly in/out of the trade.	**Repeatedly moved in/out of cab drivng and security work, setting up coffee shop:** *'So yeah, I've been in and out of the trade.'*
JOB	(Dis)like Job.	**Taxi driver, Night shifts but struggles with antisocial hours:** *"All my cab life has been nights, yeah." Cost me my first marriage, working all the nights.*
ORGANISATION	(Dis)like organization.	**In/out of local cab firms, as a result of falling out with colleagues. Set up his own cab company, but closed due to debt.**
CAB DRIVER/ CUSTOMER	Poor/Good rapport with customers.	**Prefers working with night shift customers:** *You get to see the world in a whole new light when you're doing the night shift. You're ferrying around the drug dealers, the prostitutes, the drunk businessmen, the drunk lawyers, the people up to affairs and no good. And I get that, you know?*
CAB DRIVING WORK/LIFE	Poor/Good work/life balance.	**Enjoys flexible working, but under pressure to work long hours:** *'I like the freedom, it's quite pure and simple.' 'I tried to go back to sort of having set hours, be home at certain times. Weren't being dragged out by cab companies 'cos they were short of drivers.'*

Evaluation of Career Boundary: Negative; Negative/Positive; Positive; Neutral

9.4 'Means to an End'

CHRONOLOGICAL DATA TABLE					
Driver Case Number	**Past Work Experiences**	**Transition to Cab Driving**	**Subsequent Cab Driving Roles**	**Current Role**	**Future Plans**
Driver 24 'Keith'	Left school age 18 yrs Worked for his family firm - furniture manufacture 10 yrs Trained as personal financial advisor Senior manager with national bank Found role increasingly stressful Decided to leave & setup property management company	Age 45-50 Voluntary Taxi driver part-time Alongside setting up his property company Nephew helped with license & job	Taxi driver, part-time, day shifts Works for a small cab firm who let him choose his hours Enjoys the work - mostly the flexibility to run his other business	Age 50- 55 Taxi driver, part-time, day shifts His priority is flexible work & cab driving offers this	Plans to continue cab driving until his own company is financially viable

FIELDWORK JOURNAL - EXTRACTS (DRIVER 24)

'This was an interview of contrasts. I met a cab driver in the first instance, but soon after that the businessman. Of course, most cab drivers have to be both, but the businessman is not always so present. I can picture him managing an office in a bank, helping run his father's firm, setting-up his property company. But he is also fully engaged with the taxi work and enjoys it. No sense of loss of status.'

'Interesting to have transcribed this one. I heard much more clearly his struggles with the bank, middle management. And the relief in his voice to be back in control of his life.'

EVALUATION TABLE

NARRATIVE / BOUNDARY	PROGRESSIVE PLOTLINE	EVALUATION EXAMPLE
	MEANS TO AND END	KEITH (DRIVER 24)
OCCUPATION	Planful transition. Occupation of choice. Routeway of choice.	**Transitioned from banking to earn basic income, whilst setting up new company:** *'So it's a sea change from banking, but being local and being flexible that was ok, that was what I was looking for. And I enjoy the flexibility of it I think more than anything.'*
JOB	(Dis)like Job.	**Taxi driver, Part-time shifts**
ORGANISATION	(Dis)like organisation.	**Works for small, local company**
CAB DRIVER/ CUSTOMER	Poor/Good rapport with customers.	**Customers service skills from prior occupation useful to deal with clients**
CAB DRIVING WORK/LIFE	Flexibility is key. Working hours of choice to fit around other life commitments.	**Enjoys flexible working opportunities:** *'When there's time on the ranks at all then I can sort out other things with the property stuff, so it fits in quite well.'*

Evaluation of Career Boundary: Negative | Negative/Positive | Positive | Neutral

9.5 'Second Chance'

CHRONOLOGICAL DATA TABLE					
Driver Case Number	**Past Work Experiences**	**Transition to Cab Driving**	**Subsequent Cab Driving Roles**	**Current Role**	**Future Plans**
Driver 12 'Neil'	Left school age 16 yrs Completed apprenticeship as a printer Lost his job as industry contracted Set up his own specialist print firm, but that failed Decided no option but to leave print industry	Age 35-40 Involuntary Minicab driver Helped with license by colleagues from print trade who had become cab drivers	General minicab work for several local firms Trained as black cab driver (yellow badge) – whilst working as minicab driver Close rapport with local customers Likes flexible hours to help with childcare	Age 40-45 Black cab driver (yellow badge) Training for green badge Self-employed, works primarily from local taxi ranks Flexible hours useful whilst training	Plans for both himself & wife to work PT once he completes green badge Continue to build up local customer base Useful autonomy of being self-employed & family friendly hours

FIELDWORK JOURNAL - EXTRACTS (DRIVER 12)

'It was hard for this participant to tell the first part of his story. He had clearly loved his years working in the printing trade. I wasn't sure how things would turn out, if he had come to terms with his working life as a printer coming to such a painful end. But then the tone shifted, he sat up, his body language shifted. I was so glad to hear that things were working out - for him and his whole family.'

EVALUATION TABLE

NARRATIVE / BOUNDARY	PROGRESSIVE PLOTLINE	EVALUATION EXAMPLE
	SECOND CHANCE	NEIL (DRIVER 12)
OCCUPATION	Permeable boundary allows access to 2nd career following ill heath, redundancy.	**Transitioned into cab driving following decline of print industry:** *'At the beginning when I came out of the print and the way things went, I felt really that everything was very unjust. But after all this time now I sort of think it was a blessing, which I never would have thought.'*
JOB	Access to job of choice. Perceived career advancement.	**Minicab driver, Black cab (Yellow Badge), training for Black cab (Green Badge):** *'I never realised how work much it was, but really if you knew, if you put that effort into something like this then it's for a huge reward.'*
ORGANISATION	Access to organisation of choice. Perceived career advancement.	**Employed by local minicab firm, now works as a sole trader from local black cab rank**
CAB DRIVER/ CUSTOMER	Good rapport. Build long-term relationships. Customer as friend/family.	**Enjoys working with local customers, some of who are regular clients:** *'I think if you're a taxi driver you haven't got any work colleagues like in an office, so your customers are everything.'*
CAB DRIVING WORK/LIFE	Good work/life balance.	**Works PT, flexible hours to manage childcare commitments and studying for The Knowledge (Green Badge).**

Evaluation of Career Boundary: Negative | Negative/Positive | Positive | Neutral

9.6 'Salvation'

CHRONOLOGICAL DATA TABLE					
Driver Case Number	**Past Work Experiences**	**Transition to Cab Driving**	**Subsequent Cab Driving Roles**	**Current Role**	**Future Plans**
Driver 22 'Justin'	Rarely in school, left with no qualifications Factory work Cleaning Farm labourer Cafe/takeaway store Call handler for local taxi firm Wanted to earn more money as a taxi driver	Age 35-40 Voluntary Taxi driver Colleagues helped with license & his employer offered him a cab driving job Step up in status from 'rubbish jobs'	Taxi driver full-time, all shifts Found nights difficult in recent years, switched to day shifts Stayed with same small cab firm	Age 40-45 Taxi driver, full-time, day shifts Stayed with same small cab firm Enjoys close interaction with regular customers Likes 'ready cash'	Plan to stay in cab driving, with same firm. Perceives this as the culmination of his career, professional work

FIELDWORK JOURNAL - EXTRACTS (DRIVER 22)

'There was such a sense of energy to this participant. I could picture him getting into trouble years ago at school, struggling to settle into anything. His pride in his work as a taxi driver was there in his voice. He has found his place in life, his family and his career. We laughed a lot.'

EVALUATION TABLE

NARRATIVE / BOUNDARY	PROGRESSIVE PLOTLINE	EVALUATION EXAMPLE
	SALVATION	JUSTIN (DRIVER 22)
OCCUPATION	Permeable boundary allows rescue from low status work. Professional identity.	**Transitioned into cab driving following limited education, ad hoc low status work:** Described prior work as: *'Ridiculous, rubbish jobs.'*
JOB	Access to job of choice. Perceived career advancement.	**Taxi driver - Night shifts, Day shifts** *'So there I was a taxi driver, a proper job.'*
ORGANISATION	Access to organisation of choice. Perceived career advancement.	**Employed by local taxi firm, no plans to leave:** *'I like it here, they all know me and I know them.'*
CAB DRIVER/ CUSTOMER	Good rapport. Build long-term relationships. Customer as friend/family.	**Enjoys working with local customers, some of who are regular clients:** *'Sometimes you can't wait to get the next instalment of their life. So you think 'Oh I'm going to go and pick so and so up.' And I can't wait to see them, catch up with what's going on with them this week, see how they are.'*
CAB DRIVING WORK/LIFE	Good work/life balance. Prefer cash income.	**Earns a living wage, prefers cash income:** *'I don't earn a fortune, but I make a living and the cash… I like the ready cash.'*

Evaluation of Career Boundary: Negative | Negative/Positive | Positive | Neutral

9.7 'Final'

CHRONOLOGICAL DATA TABLE					
Driver Case Number	**Past Work Experiences**	**Transition to Cab Driving**	**Subsequent Cab Driving Roles**	**Current Role**	**Future Plans**
Driver 17 'Carol'	Left school age 16 yrs Completed apprenticeship as hairdresser Set up & managed own hairdressing business for > 30 yrs Became bored with hair-dressing & wanted new challenge	Age 50-55 Voluntary Taxi driver Friend helped with license & offered job	General taxi work, full-time Bought out the local firm she was working for Bought a 2nd cab firm and merged it with her own	Age 60-65 Owner/ Manager - 15 staff & husband & daughter Retains her taxi license & drives on daily basis Enjoys working early shifts Enjoys social interaction with staff & customers	Would like to retire in a couple of years Pass the cab firm onto her daughter

FIELDWORK JOURNAL - EXTRACTS (DRIVER 17)

'I was made welcome by this participant from the moment I stepped through the doorway of her cab firm. It was a complete cold call on my part. I had had no luck so far this morning - turned down by three other cab firms in a row. I was just walking past and decided to try one more place before lunch. She sat me down with a cup of tea, quizzed me about the research, agreed to be interviewed and roped in two other cab drivers all within half an hour. A tour de force with the kindest heart.'

'Transcribing this interview has given me greater time to appreciate this participant's energy and business acumen. At a point in her career/life when others might be slowing the pace, she has taken over two cab firms and is running a successful business. The matriarch of a big happy family.'

EVALUATION TABLE

NARRATIVE / BOUNDARY	PROGRESSIVE PLOTLINE	EVALUATION EXAMPLE
	FINAL	CAROL (DRIVER 17)
OCCUPATION	Planful transition. Access to work at late career stage. Routeway of choice.	**Dissatisfied with running hairdressing business, looking for final stage career:** *'I was so sick and tired of hairdressing, so I thought 'Oh, I'll do something else.' And my husband was looking down the paper one day… and he said 'Oh there's a cab driving thing here and you like driving.'*
JOB	Access to job of choice.	**Taxi driver:** *'When I first started there was just me and only a couple of other women out there and we did get a bit of stick. But it's got better and there's quite a lot of women out there now, especially as a lot of ladies…. they like a lady driver.'*
ORGANISATION	Access to organisation of choice.	**Employed by local taxi firm, then took over that company as owner/manager**
CAB DRIVER/ CUSTOMER	Good rapport. Build long-term relationships. Customer as friend/family.	**Enjoys working with local customers, some of who are regular clients:** *'And with my hairdressing, I was like the social worker as well, you know. If families couldn't help them out, then I was running around doing the shopping, doing everything. And the same as what you do in this industry… you get to know your customers and you help them out.'*
CAB DRIVING WORK/LIFE	Good work/life balance. Option to go PT into retirement.	**Works flexible hours to suit, but looking to going part-time and then retire:** 'I want to retire at some point!'

Evaluation of Career Boundary: Negative; Negative/Positive; Positive; Neutral

9.8 'LIFELONG'

CHRONOLOGICAL DATA TABLE					
Driver Case Number	**Past Work Experiences**	**Transition to Cab Driving**	**Subsequent Cab Driving Roles**	**Current Role**	**Future Plans**
Driver 06 'Barry'	Left school age 16 yrs Completed apprenticeship as engineer Left after 2 years due to sight problems Worked as a milkman Looking for new, long term career	Age 20-25 Voluntary Taxi driver Friend helped with license & finding job	General taxi work for 12 years, full-time, all shifts Switched to day shifts after attempted stabbings Set-up his own cab driving company	Age 60-65 Taxi driver, sole trader, airport work, full-time Regular clientele, many of which he regards as friends Adjusted working hours over the years to suit family life Strong sense of professional pride	Hopes to continue driving for several more years Perhaps move to part-time work as he gets older

FIELDWORK JOURNAL - EXTRACTS (DRIVER 06)

'This participant was such a modest man, but he has worked hard and crafted for himself a successful business from scratch. I think he has been in the industry longer than any other participant so far in the study? Over 40 years? And still going.'

'The sense of career advancement is much stronger now that I done the transcription. Really right from the outset as he moved from night to day shifts. Then the process of building his own business and his sense of professional pride.'

EVALUATION TABLE

NARRATIVE / BOUNDARY	PROGRESSIVE PLOTLINE	EVALUATION EXAMPLE
	LIFELONG	BARRY (DRIVER 06)
OCCUPATION	Traditional career. Cross boundary by mid 20s. Professional identity.	**Transitioned looking for secure and long-term career, worked over 40 years in trade:** *'I'm not overly intelligent, but I am a professional driver.'*
JOB	Access to job of choice. Perceived career advancement.	**Taxi driver - Night shift, Day shift:** *'I changed it from doing days and nights, to doing all days.'*
ORGANISATION	Access to organisation of choice. Perceived career advancement.	**Employed by local taxi firm, then set up as sole trader:** *'I like working for myself, being my own boss. Nobody really tells me what to do, where to go. I just… I look after my customers so I like that.'*
CAB DRIVER/ CUSTOMER	Good rapport. Build long-term relationships. Customer as friend/family.	**Enjoys working with local customers, some of who are regular clients:** *'They're friends. They're friends and customers, you know?'*
CAB DRIVING WORK/LIFE	Negotiate preferred work/life balance across the life course.	**Worked long hours to set up company, but can now flex hours to suit:** *'I've got time to go and walk the dog, pick the kids up from school. I took two of them to school this morning before I came here. I've got quality time with the kids.'*

Evaluation of Career Boundary: Negative; Negative/Positive; Positive; Neutral